Re/Dressing Cathleen



Contemporary Works from Irish Women Artists

McMULLEN MUSEUM OF ART
BOSTON COLLEGE

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Rita Duffy
Mary FitzGerald
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Mary Lohan
Alice Maher
Deirdre O'Connell
Eilís O'Connell
Gwen O'Dowd
Geraldine O'Reilly
Kathy Prendergast
Louise Walsh

EDITED BY JENNIFER GRINNELL AND ALSTON CONLEY

McMULLEN MUSEUM OF ART
BOSTON COLLEGE

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Berry Dress
1994
cotton, rose hips and pins
12 x 10 x 6 in.
Courtesy of the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin

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Eilís O'Connell
Cathoid
1996
cast lead crystal
12 x 12 x 6 in.
Courtesy of Green on Red Gallery, Dublin

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LENDERS TO THE EXHIBITION

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NOTE TO THE READER:

Numbered images and plates in this book are works in the exhibition. Additional images are designated as "figures."

Measurements are given in inches and feet, height preceding width. Figures for engravings, etchings and drawings refer to the size of the plate or pencil mark, or, if not visible, the image.

Abbreviated references are listed in full at the back of each essay or appendix.

Letters in the appendix are reproduced with the writer's original punctuation and grammar. In some instances, however, spelling has been modernized to assist the reader.

DIRECTOR'S PREFACE

The McMullen Museum of Art at Boston College is proud to present *Re/Dressing Cathleen: Contemporary Works from Irish Women Artists*, the first exhibition in America dedicated to the works of Ireland's current female artists. The exhibition and accompanying catalogue are intended to highlight the contributions of these women to both the imaging and recontextualization of national identity, as well as to broader currents in European and American contemporary art. Nearly two years ago, the Museum explored Irish painting from roughly the period of the Great Famine, from the middle of the nineteenth century through the first half of the twentieth century, in the landmark exhibition *America's Eye: Irish Painting from the Collection of Brian P. Burns*. As I wrote in the preface to that accompanying catalogue, our primary goal was to "introduce an American audience to the riches of Irish painting against an interdisciplinary backdrop."

We now present similar insights into the art and culture of a subsequent period through the works of thirteen artists. These works, in various media, epitomize the range, innovation, and international importance of contemporary production by Irish women artists. The exhibition evolved from an appeal from Norma Smurfit, Chairman of the Famine Commemoration Committee in Ireland. She asked that professors of Irish Studies at Boston College assume a significant and innovative role in the international event commemorating "Black '47," the pivotal year of the Great Famine. Adele Dalsimer, co-chairman of our Irish Studies Program, and I seized upon the idea of an exhibition, accompanied by a program of films, lectures, and readings, that would celebrate the contributions of women to Irish culture and contemporary society as a fitting tribute to the particular burden borne by them during the Great Famine. Special debts of gratitude to Sean Rowland, director of the Center for Irish Management at Boston College, who helped pave the way for this project from its inception, and to Carmel Naughton, president of the National Gallery of Ireland, who agreed to open the exhibition.

Alston Conley, museum curator and a professor of painting, and Mary Armstrong, also a professor of painting in the Boston College Department of Fine Arts, selected the artists. Together they scoured galleries and studios throughout the north and south of Ireland. They assembled a distinguished group of professors from the Fine Arts department and from the Irish Studies Program to determine the candidates and to write the essays in this catalogue that cast the selected works in a broad interdisciplinary cultural context. To each of them and to the museums, galleries, and collectors who have lent to this exhibition, I extend heartfelt thanks.

The Herculean task of editing the catalogue fell to Jennifer Grinnell and Mr. Conley. Ms. Grinnell also oversaw the production of the catalogue and arrangements for loans. In all of these tasks, she was aided by our graduate research assistant Heather Fryer. We are also grateful to Naomi Rosenberg for her careful copyediting of the text, to Monica DeSalvo for her handsome design of this book, and, again, to Mr. Conley for the inspired design and installation of the exhibition. As always, we are indebted to other members of the museum staff for their dedication to this project: Alice Harkins, Aisha Bain, Holly Graham, and, last but not least, our ever-efficient administrator, Helen Swartz.

Exhibitions and catalogues of this scale require generous financial backing. We are especially indebted to Boston College for financial support, particularly to William P. Leahy, S.J., Margaret Dwyer, William Neenan S.J., Francis Campanella, J. Robert Barth, S.J., Richard Spinello, and Lynn Prosser. We also extend thanks to the Friends of the McMullen Museum.

Finally, I wish to thank the artists participating in *Re/Dressing Cathleen*. Their talent, creativity, and dedication, which have helped to alter cultural and social attitudes concerning the role of women in contemporary Ireland, serve as an inspiration to us all.

NANCY NETZER

ALSTON CONLEY AND JENNIFER GRINNELL

Re/Dressing Cathleen:

Contemporary Works from Irish Women Artists

This exhibition arose from the confluence of interests between the McMullen Museum of Art and the faculty in the Irish Studies Program and Fine Arts Department. In particular, Irish Studies wanted to commemorate the 150th anniversary of "Black '47"—the pivotal year of the Great Famine (1845-49)—and the particular burden it placed on the women of Ireland. The Museum, for its part, had previously presented two historical exhibitions of Irish artworks, and wished to follow these up with an exhibition of artworks by contemporary Irish artists, lest we leave the impression that Ireland, and its art, exists arrested within the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. The only previous exhibit of contemporary Irish art at Boston College was held in the early '80s when the Fine Arts Department Gallery, the Irish Studies Program and Northeastern University co-hosted an exhibition of male Irish neo-expressionists. In retrospect we can see that this gender exclusion reflected what was also happening in Ireland: a resurgence of expressionism dominated almost exclusively by male artists, and exemplified in 1983 by the defining, all male, neo-expressionists exhibit *Making Sense: ten painters, 1963-1983,* at the Project Arts Centre.[1] Subsequently in the late '80s and '90s, the women artists of Ireland moved into the fore, concurrent with society's increasing interest in issues that primarily effected women's lives, such as the Abortion Referendum (1983) and the Divorce Referendum (1986). This exhibition is an opportunity to review the accomplishments of Irish women artists over the last decade.

These achievements of the last decade are conspicuous in the forty-six works by thirteen women artists that comprise this exhibition: Pauline Cummins, Rita Duffy, Mary FitzGerald, Eithne Jordan, Finola Jones, Mary Lohan, Alice Maher, Deirdre O'Connell, Eilís O'Connell, Gwen O'Dowd, Geraldine O'Reilly, Kathy Prendergast and Louise Walsh. Varied and diverse in media, visual language, intent and content, these images mirror the active and lively art scene in Ireland, which is supported by businesses, private collectors, galleries, government agencies (like the Arts Council), public art commissions, subsidized studios, an artists' union, and a rising generation of young artists with the opportunity, support and tenacity to persevere.

Underlying and connecting these diverse works is the issue of identity. The constant personification and imaging of Ireland as "Mother Ireland" has made identity a particularly rich subject for Irish women artists. Representations of Ireland in traditional folklore, myth, and literature as a fortress or mother/female incarnation of nationhood have inspired these contemporary artists' investigations.

Re/Dressing Cathleen is an interdisciplinary investigation, drawing on the expertise of the Boston College faculty in the Fine Arts Department; the Irish Studies Program (from both English and History Departments); and contributions by scholars from the U.S. and Ireland. The essays examine the negotiation of identity in present day Ireland as reflected in recent contemporary culture, and in particular the visual arts. Art critic Medb Ruane and art historian Claude Cernuschi introduce the artists' work within a broader context. Ruane summarizes the history of Irish art in this century within a political and cultural context, and the role of the current generation of

artists in mediating and imaging Irish identity. Cernuschi positions the artists within contemporary Western artistic practice, an extension of the pan-European and American traditions of the twentieth century from which the artists under discussion trained and emerge. Literary critics Adele Dalsimer, Vera Kreilkamp, James Smith and Philip O'Leary all connect artists in the current exhibition to similar uses of imagery in Ireland's better-known literary tradition. Dalsimer and Kreilkamp have given us the title for the exhibition by "re/dressing" historical images of Mother Ireland in their essay—in particular W.B. Yeats' *Cathleen Ní Houilhan*—through comparisons of recent feminist imagery in contemporary art and literature. Smith investigates Ireland's recent "narrative retellings" by deconstructing official political and religious stories. Exploring Kathy Prendergast's *Body Map Series* (nos. 21-28, pl. VIII, nos. 29-30, pl. IX, no. 31) and Mary Leland's story *The Killeen,* Smith finds in both the re-negotiation of an "alternative national narrative." O'Leary correlates the depiction and influence of American popular culture on Irish culture in literature from James Joyce to Patrick McCabe or Roddy Doyle, to a similar reincarnation in the visual arts in the installation by Finola Jones.

Identity connects the examinations that explore myth and folklore, the body and the land, and land and boundaries in the essays by Pamela Berger, Angela Bourke, Katherine Nahum and Robert Savage. By exploring contemporary representations of ancient Celtic motifs, architecture and the landscape, these essays also collectively encourage further examinations of Ireland's visual tradition.[2] Berger explores "mythic memory," ancient traditions, artworks and legends that imbued Celtic identity. Acknowledged or not, the visual representations of these traditions—from natural formations in the landscape that were highly charged with magic/religious significance, to the human head (the essence of the human being in early Irish epic) or the genitalia-exposing sheela-na-gigs—reappear in contemporary artworks presented in this exhibition. Angela Bourke demonstrates a connection between the natural features of the Irish landscape and the female body to the folkloric stories surrounding places called *uaimh*. Bourke contends that the Irish word *uaimh,* or cave—the name of a series of paintings by Gwen O'Dowd (nos. 1-2, pl. I, no. 3)—enriches the metaphoric readings of the paintings as well as affirming Irish identity. Katherine Nahum portrays the connections between Eilís O'Connell's abstract sculpture (nos. 39, pl. XIII, nos. 40-44) and the female body, their references to nature and historical Irish artifacts such as the sheela-na-gig. Robert Savage gives us a summary of the conflict between the Republic and Northern Ireland and examines, through works by Geraldine O'Reilly (nos. 8, 14) and Deirdre O'Connell (nos. 6, 7), identity as revealed in the landscape, its physical structures and negotiated borders. In O'Reilly's works, he probes a connection among the battles, ancient and recent, that define the warrior past, the Celtic "cult of the head" and the land.

Ireland's cultural identity was also shaped by the hardship and loss that resulted from the Great Famine and the subsequent mass emigration. Of approximately one million rural Irish who fled to North America, Britain and Australia, two-thirds were single women, many of whom wrote poignant letters describing the trials of adapting to life in nineteenth-century urban America. Historian Ruth-Ann Harris compiles in an appendix examples of "American Letters," as they were called in Ireland. We present this collection to encourage further research on the complexities of the immigrant experience.

In her *Emigrant Letter* Series (nos. 9-12, pl. IV, no. 13), artist Geraldine O'Reilly also responds to the Great Famine as a pivotal experience in Irish and American history, and its affect on women émigrés. Her interest in Irish emigration to the United States arose from her own temporary American experience as a Fulbright scholar researching Irish-American labor history. A cache of letters found in the Ellis Island warehouse, written by immigrant Irish women in the U.S. to their families in Ireland, inspired O'Reilly's collages of old paper, fabric and images executed in watercolor in "the color of bruised memory" which represent the hardship and loss of immigration. Together, the actual documentary letters and O'Reilly's visual symbols poignantly illuminate how the Famine and subsequent Diaspora drastically changed the social and cultural landscapes of Ireland.

Mary Armstrong and Alston Conley, co-curators of the exhibition and both artists themselves, conducted interviews with several of the artists at their studios in Ireland. The results of these artist-to-artist conversations reveal the planning, process and meaning behind many of the works displayed in *Re/Dressing Cathleen.* Rita Duffy describes her dream-like paintings that re-image issues of childhood, Catholicism and identity; Mary Lohan talks about the importance of the sense of place for the landscape

painter; Mary FitzGerald describes how the influence of an Asian aesthetic shapes her conceptions of space and structure; Eilís O'Connell relates the impact of the urban environment on her sculpture, and the importance of material to the object's ultimate form; Gwen O'Dowd describes the multiple readings possible in her paintings that are based loosely on the landscape and blowholes of County Mayo; Geraldine O'Reilly speaks to the influence of the Great Famine, "the Troubles," and Irish-American history on her work; and Pauline Cummins and Louise Walsh invite the viewer to experience their multi-media installation as "a journey from a position of tightness and unease to a place of self-discovery and power."

The successful realization of a project such as this depends on the commitment, collaboration and assistance of many participants. The research into the art and artists of Ireland, whose works are rarely seen and little known on these shores, is an exciting undertaking. The resulting choices and exhibition are a reflection of both Irish culture and the curators' eyes. We are beholden to Mary Armstrong, co-curator of the exhibition, whose insight, understanding and ebullience, her artist's eye and cultivated perception helped shape and inform the exhibition.

This exhibition would not be possible with out the generous support of the artists, galleries and private collectors who lent us their works, and assisted in various ways with the organization and planning of this exhibition. We warmly acknowledge their generosity: Catherine Marshall (Irish Museum of Modern Art); Jerome Driscoll, Samantha Harding (Green on Red Gallery); Josephine Kelliher, Margaret Timmes (Rubicon Gallery); Mr. John Taylor (Taylor Galleries); Patricia Murphy; Maurice and Maire Foley; John Kennedy (Kerlin Gallery); Dieter and Birgit Broska; Justina and Peter Farrell; David Murray; Pauline Cummins; Rita Duffy; Mary FitzGerald; Finola Jones; Eithne Jordan; Mary Lohan; Alice Maher; Deirdre O'Connell; Eilís O'Connell; Geraldine O'Reilly; Gwen O'Dowd; Kathy Prendergast; and Louise Walsh.

We are indebted to all the contributing scholars who observed the art from the perspective of their individual disciplines and whose essays illuminate the artworks, enriching our readings of the work and culture. The participating faculty of the distinguished Irish Studies Program deserve our profound thanks for their support and efforts on behalf of the project. Adele Dalsimer, whose love of art and literature has translated into her enthusiasm for this exhibition is given special thanks. This catalogue has benefitted greatly from the advice and expertise of Robert Savage, historian and associate director of the Irish Studies Program, and Vera Kreilkamp, professor of English Literature at Pine Manor College and Literature Editor of *Eire-Ireland*, for which we extend our thanks.

Katherine Nahum, Adjunct Professor of Fine Arts, read the catalogue manuscript in its entirety and offered crucial editorial suggestions, for which we offer our thanks. We also thank Naomi Rosenberg for her thoughtful copyediting. Once again we have benefited from her generous spirit and facility with language.

Heather Fryer, graduate research assistant and doctoral candidate in the Department of History at Boston College, read and copyedited the essays, wrote the gallery wall texts and the preface to the appendix, and expedited the myriad details that attend the organization of an exhibition. The completion of this project and catalogue are due in no small part to her commitment and intelligence.

Monica DeSalvo of Boston College Office of Publications and Design Services created the graceful catalogue and invitation designs under the direction of David Williams, Director of Design Services. Sean Rowland, Director, Center for Irish Management, his staff and Sara McDonnell in Ireland were supportive and helpful and due our gratitude. Steve Vedder and the audiovisual department provided valuable photographic support. Helen Swartz, Museum Administrator, Aisha Bain, undergraduate assistant, Holly Graham, intern, Alice Harkins, Supervisor of Museum Security and her staff of security officers, all contributed in crucial ways.

Finally, we are indebted to the enthusiastic support, from the beginning, of Director Nancy Netzer, without which the project could not have been accomplished.

Notes

1 Neo-expressionism was promoted as a predominately male international movement. Francesco Clemente, Sandro Chia and Enzo Cucchi from Italy, Anselm Kiefer, George Baselitz, A.R. Penck and Jörg Immendorff from Germany and in the United States Julian Schnabel, David Salle, were prominent figures. The American Susan Rothenberg is one of the few women to break into this formerly all-male club.

2 In 1996 Adele Dalsimer and Vera Kreilkamp explored nineteenth and twentieth century Ireland's contribution to the visual arts through their exhibition *America's Eye: Irish Paintings from the Collection of Brian P Burns* (also at the McMullen Museum of Art), and helped dispel the notion that Ireland—better known for its literary tradition—lacks a visual imagination



MEDB RUANE

Re/Dressing Cathleen: A Local Perspective

Somewhere deep in the basement of Irish culture, a once-pristine collection of icons lies crumbling, and disowned. Long ago, their power inspired a cultural revival that changed the shape of history. Among these dusty relics is the figure of Cathleen Ní Houlihan, formerly a spiritual aristocrat beloved of such writers as William Butler Yeats and Sean O'Casey,[1] and a true star of popular culture one hundred years ago.

To contemporary generations, Cathleen is a stereotype, an empty symbol of times gone by. Consigned to old songs on scratched vinyl,[2] her name may seem to have lost its resonance. But its mythic properties linger throughout twentieth-century Irish history, personifying ideas about culture and women's place therein which still set teeth on edge. A diva of "high" and "low" art during the cultural revival that articulated Irish nationalism, Cathleen's persona was once as interchangeable with ideas of Mother Ireland, as of Catholicism's Virgin Mary. Cathleen Ní Houlihan represented the ideal woman in what amounted to a sacrificial social order, which required women to offer up their lives and their bodies in the service of higher ideals.

What I will call "the Cathleen principle" refers to the sentimentalizing of human experience encouraged by this monolith, and to all the denial of humanity that implied.

Outside the basement, the generation participating in this exhibition positions itself within a global context, a network of forces that stretches way beyond the territorial limits of national boundaries. All are Irish, yet the description doesn't guarantee either citizenship or domicile—some live in the Republic of Ireland, some in Northern Ireland, England, the United States. Set their widely varied practice in that broader context and the issues raised become profoundly resonant—marginality, identity, gender, territory, the place of visual culture; the whole experience of "otherness" within a dominant cultural discourse. Read those themes against old stereotypes, and they confirm a radical shift in Irish cultural and social practices, which is reframing ideas about Ireland and Irishness, within both visual art and the wider culture.

The global context which immediately precedes this generation starts in the '60s, when exclusive models of cultural practice started to shatter across disciplines, not least the modernist ethic which so dominated visual culture. Modernism was a bully, and once its posturing was undermined, "marginal" places like Ireland could, in theory, claim to be as valid as anywhere, precisely because there was no longer a "center" that could patronize everywhere else. Feminist practice occupied a front-line position in the fight against that ethic, arguing for inclusiveness, for openness, for a way of seeing which transcended sex, race, nationality and medium. Inevitably, the status of women artists improved, irrespective of whether or not their practice was specifically feminist.

Feminism's reclaiming of the female body was precisely the kind of activity that icons like Cathleen had always disallowed. Despite the powerful contributions of Irish women to universal suffrage, home rule and civil rights throughout the British Empire—the first female Member of Parliament at Westminster was Irish socialist Constance Markievicz— women were

NO. 32 (P. 10)
Alice Maher
Berry Dress
1994
cotton, rose hips and pins
12 x 10 x 6 in.
Courtesy of the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin

confined to a domestic sphere within both states on the island. Virginia Woolf's dictum "My body is my country" was inverted nowhere more than in Ireland: women's bodies became political sites.

In one sense, the story of the territory itself is told in the story of women. Repressive social and economic legislation eroded the presence of women at all levels of public life, provoking a series of increasingly vociferous debates which persist to this day. But in 1990, the Republic's body politic elected a woman as its Head of State, and attempts to reassert those exclusivist, traditional values symbolized by the Cathleen principle were sharply undercut by the living, breathing, and extremely popular figure of President Mary Robinson (served 1990-97), now the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. Her presidential term in particular marks the transition from that old, monolithic order, even though the rate of transition differs sharply between the Republic and Northern Ireland.

If the socio-political context affecting women within Ireland is changing, so too is the scope of art practice, and visual culture. While Modernism was enduring its death throes, many Irish artists and critics were anticipating the emergence of a specifically "Irish" genre. Although the world-wide '60s zeitgeist occupied Ireland too, expressing itself on fronts that ranged from economic growth in the Republic to political upheaval in Northern Ireland, the culture itself remained enthralled by a vision of Ireland and Irishness which invested heavily in old-style myths.

The rigorous enforcement of those mythologies reflected their central role in elaborating and maintaining political and cultural identities on the island. Ireland's colonial status as part of the British Empire had changed in the '20s, when the British Government established first the state of Northern Ireland (1920), and then the Irish Free State (1922). Northern Ireland was part of the United Kingdom; the Free State became a nominal dominion, and formally declared itself a Republic in 1949. The origins of both states were highly contested, yet their respective cultural identities shared monolithic, supremacist features: both thrived on the poles of Gael or Loyalist as fixed political constructs, wholly singular identities that mirrored each other to a remarkable degree.

Years before cultural critic Edward Said identified the general principle, Irish-American critic Brian

O'Doherty's 1971 remarks summarized the effect on Irish art practice of what is now recognized as the post-colonial syndrome. Writing about The Irish Imagination, an exhibition curated to coincide with the four-yearly international show Rosc, O'Doherty notes about recent Irish art that its "atmosphere is characterized by a mythical rather than a historical sense, an uneasy and restless fix on the unimportant, and a reluctance to engage with anything about what is painted, let alone make a positive statement about it." [3] Anything that didn't fit the Irish experience was rejected, hence the absence of pop art or technology —or of any contemporary references that assumed a wider visual role than traditional painterly values.

What this meant in fact was an almost total avoidance of Conceptualism, as developed from Marcel Duchamp's assertions in 1917,[4] an extremely limited engagement with surrealism, and barely a trace of expressionism, for most of the century. Although the '60s did set the tone for limited debates between the more self-consciously avant-garde "minimalist" community (exhibiting together as the Irish Exhibition of Living Art) and the emerging "expressionist" community (showing as Independent Artists), the arguments remained fixed on style, as polarized by those two positions.

With hindsight, the quest to identify an "Irish" art reads as an attempt to escape provincial status, whether in its drive to articulate a specific identity or its tacit recognition that being "marginal" was a distinct disadvantage. The contest for the soul of Irish art seems to have envisioned a specific type of practice—contemporary testimony presents the poles in stark relief. Witness artist Patrick Collins (1911-94):

"What's lacking in Irish art now is, in my opinion—Jesus ! I shouldn't say things like this—everybody wants to look out instead of looking in...They haven't realised that they have a Celtic identity that's endured for five thousand years and that nobody has painted just what that means. Why should we be just a colony, we have something here to say."[5]

So few resources were invested in cultural institutions generally that the task was guaranteed to be an uphill struggle, however impossible its ultimate objective. Yet from the late '70s, policy-driven State investment started to build a cultural infrastructure, developing a network of studios, galleries, public art programs and artist-assistance funds, largely in response to massive frustrations articulated by cultural practitioners. But it was a mammoth task—there was no museum of modern art, a tiny commercial sector, poor educational facilities, no tradition of private patronage, no tax relief to encourage sponsorship and investment—and an economy weighed down by indebtedness.

The process of questioning tacit cultural assumptions took much longer. When in 1980 Irish art went to London—its former imperial capital—it gathered itself together under the banner title *The Delighted Eye*, a group exhibition that maintained the premise of an innately visual, romantic practice, comfortable with its narrow cultural role.[6] According to its reading, "Irish" art might at times intersect with other cultural features by engaging literary or mythic themes, but its heart was essentially conservative. US art critic Lucy Lippard encountered much the same characteristics when she surveyed Irish art in 1984. She called it "tantalizingly indirect," a polite term of surprise that, in a country racked by unemployment, contested identities and political violence, most artists appeared to exist on another plane. [7]

Whatever "otherness" characterized post-colonial Ireland, Irish women's traditional second-place status made that twice the case. But just as a double negative becomes a positive value in the sphere of mathematics, so many old and formerly negative attributes transform into powerful sources for debate. Landscape, a traditional subject matter, becomes territory, a contested place. Often, the site of conflict is the female body, as herself.

Challenging dogma in all its complex disguises was among the strategies of feminist practice. *Sounding the Depths* (no. 46, pl. XVI), a sound/video/photographic installation first produced at the Irish Museum of Modern Art in 1992, repositions female representation from that perspective, one pursued separately by Pauline Cummins and Louise Walsh before this collaboration.

At first glance a powerfully visceral retort to old myths of vagina dentata, *Sounding the Depths* operates deep down as a conceptual engagement with Cartesian dualism, which traditionally privileged the place of reason over feeling. When a mussel shell, held like a ventriloquist's dummy, opens up as if to speak, it mirrors the image of a mouth which emerges, genital-like, from within a naked female torso. The mussel is a



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Alice Maher
Berry Dress
1994
cotton, rose hips and pins
12 x 10 x 6 in.
Courtesy of the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin

hermaphrodite creature; it's also a symbol of Dublin folk icon Molly Malone; collecting mussels was a past-time for many Irish children. But that is local knowledge, a play on metaphors whose disruptive passion sounds in a far wider context. Cummins and Walsh set up a series of cultural and imaginative encounters, centered on the position of owner-occupiers, by skeptically upending cultural assumptions, from tabloid depictions of women to art history's pro-prietorial gaze at the female body. Mouth and vagina are not separate, are not part of different discourses within a nature/culture debate or the *Playboy* centerfold. The case for integration is voiced.

Rejecting dualism implies a return to halcyon days before the Enlightenment, before rationality set its sights on the European art tradition, meandered through the thinkers and artists of imperial Europe—Holland, France, Spain, Italy, in particular—and decided that its labors ended with modernism. But there is no return. Cultural practice is on the brink of changes whose impact can hardly be imagined—the only remote parallels in visual art are the introduction of oils to painting, or the invention of the printing press. Terms like "pre-modern" and "post-modern" are thus at best interim classifications, still fixated on the need to categorize inside a limited set of conditions, when all available evidence suggests that radically new forms will demand a radically new language.

Alice Maher's fascination with medieval iconography, fairytale and myth could seem to occupy a pre-modern position, yet her irony, her way of parodying modernist practices, might equally be called strictly post-modernist. Maher's *Familiar* series, shown at Dublin's Douglas Hyde Gallery in 1995, sets up icons all the better to undercut them, colliding international art codes with vernacular materials or themes. Large-scale, apparently abstract paintings combine with attendant floor-pieces made of flax, the latter a commentary on Ireland's ill-fated flax industry, and as such a direct assault on the negative effects of imperial economic policies. A girl-child transforms from paint to bronze to drawing, the tiny "heroine" of some bittersweet, grown-up games. Dainty three-dimensional dresses made in miniature recall childhood toys, while wryly testing modernist practices of cut-out and assemblage more readily associated with a macho canon. Sweet to behold, but dangerous in fact: *Berry Dress* (no. 32, pl. X) holds pins inside it, a form of torture for the wearer, as well a promise of more pricks than kicks for unwelcome

voyeurs; *Thorn House* (no. 33) picks up on hedges and wild shrubs in Maher's home territory, and allies the Catholic iconography of suffering and crucifixion to the domestic sphere in which earlier generations of women were confined as a matter of course.[8]

Outside such readings, Maher's *Familiar* devises a contemporary means to discuss ideas of rurality without collapsing into nostalgia, as the Cathleen principle might prefer. Although increasingly urbanized, Irish society was—and is—rooted in a rural experience, apart altogether from the mythologizing of land and landscape which occupied urban-dwelling poets like Yeats. What in literature provided writers like Seamus Heaney, Edna O'Brien, or Patrick Kavanagh with powerful, living themes, was more often an opportunity for romance when considered by painters. Landscape was beautiful, and Irish landscape could indeed provoke pleasant visual encounters. But beauty itself was contested, within feminist debate no less than in art. Given that these same places had engendered countless conflicts—territorial wars, famine when its beauty was skin deep, emigration for the millions it failed to support—traditional ideas of landscape could seem extremely vacuous.

Ideas about landscape became the testing ground for the way that visual culture might redefine its role. Kathy Prendergast's *Body Map Series* (nos. 21-28, pl. VIII, nos. 29-30, pl. IX, no. 31), made in 1983, chose to use a classical theme and means of representation—landscape drawn with watercolor and ink on paper—while making women's bodies the cultural site in question. Linking gender with territory had for years been a mythic strategy—for example, Mother Ireland, first cousin of Cathleen—yet Prendergast's series represents a major refocusing of both the nature/culture debate and the theme of gender, insofar as Irish artists had considered them. What marked out Prendergast's work was her decision to challenge traditional representation on its own ground, keeping things beautiful while demonstrating how traditional media could work to radical ends.

Eithne Jordan's painting within the neo-expressionist wave, which dominated most of the '80s, insisted on articulating images of female and familial relationships in different configurations, at a time when few women found that format hospitable. Jordan's choice of the human face as subject (no. 15, pl. V, no. 16) invokes changing understandings of portraiture, even references to the head image worked by the Celts and consciously applied in the practice of Louis Le Brocquy. Read on different lines, the paintings counter that blatant phallicism which made the penis a virtual hero in the expressionist work of other Irish artists at the time.

The international hype of neo-expressionism offered a vehicle for the Independent Artists flank in Irish art, and was thus uproariously welcomed in certain quarters. For artists like Mary FitzGerald, the new wave set in sharp relief the austere, minimalist discipline she practiced—a discipline which occupies a significant strand of contemporary interest. FitzGerald's personal experience of pain and rehabilitation after a traffic accident introduced a more explicit dimension to her painting. In one sense, her paintings started to become undone, moving from the flatness of pictorial space into a third dimension, exposing tensions between surfaces she might previously have treated as drawing. In *Spine* (no. 37) and *Heart* (no. 38), studded steel bolts and fish hooks combine with planes of glass or draped velvet, the use of fabric allowing her to introduce elements of gender, the glass leaned against the wall playing up ideas of costume and cultural habit.

Eilís O'Connell's classical insistence on maintaining opposing forces of weight and space engages with a series of contemporary discourses, across a practice spanning the contested relationships between public art and object-based work. Materials are re-aligned outside their usual properties. *Enmeshed* (no. 40) treats brass as a natural fiber; *Cathoid* (no. 42, pl. XIV) looks robust, but is made of fragile crystal. Immediate visual contrasts of inner and outer space work as signals to a metaphysical space where cultural forces can be variously invoked, cued by a surfaces that work like a skin. The gaps between what is, and what seems to be, become her focus: meditative qualities are signaled, yet spliced with potential risk; ideas of containment open into plays on womb and tomb, sexuality and death, otherness and identity.

Gwen O'Dowd's highly physical surfaces take ostensive subjects such as mountain, valley, sea, and give them a distinct pictorial existence. For Mary Lohan, the landscape is constituted as a vista, lit by the particular kind of light or topography in different places (no. 4, pl. II, no. 5). For O'Dowd, the vista is gradually replaced by the close-up: color becomes a structural tool in her practice, creating internal dimensions which lead far beyond painted surfaces. Her *Uaimh*

series (nos. 1, 2, pl. I, no. 3)—made after field trips to the west of Ireland, long a sacred place in the Irish landscape tradition—brings such issues into sharp focus, turning around the panoramic vistas of world-class geological wonders like the Grand Canyon, which she had studied earlier, conflating that grandeur and mystery with themes of sexuality and discovery. *Uaimh*, an Irish word, can mean cave, vault, pit, but may as readily suggest a tomb or grave. In O'Dowd's hands, the term takes on a disturbing range of possibilities, a sounding the depths of landscape which might or might not be metaphorical, might or might not be dangerous.

Geraldine O'Reilly's landscape practice develops into a specific engagement with text and with history through her 1988 *Emigrant Letter Series* (nos. 9-12, pl. IV, no. 13). Alongside the powerful act of reclaiming the words of individuals who are otherwise lost to history, O'Reilly engages with the concept of the Irish Diaspora, a theme which became central to Mary Robinson's presidency. The Diaspora concept as championed by Robinson broke the stranglehold of cultural isolationism, which had dominated twentieth-century Ireland, by placing "Irishness" outside national boundaries, and outside territorial contests. Its cultural power was formidable: articulating "Irishness" in a global context made strong economic and political sense, enabling alliances across cultures, while identifying a new discourse with the potential to reframe relationships on the island.

Old cultural costumes no longer fit. Finola Jones's *LUSCIOUS — an aesthetic view of culture* (no. 45, pl. XV) installs a medley of icons acquired in discount shops in a virtual post-modernist altarpiece. Action Man, St. Martin De Porres and Mickey Mouse share a platform with the Blessed Virgin and Bart Simpson. An innate theatricality operates a system of viewing transactions: various figures and groupings can be classified according to material, economic origin, color, gender —or disassociated, if desired. Visual culture on this reading positions itself as a cross-cultural discipline, interrogating assumptions about cultural identity and the basis of its formation. It is its own museum without walls, steeled with a sense of itself as commodity and inviting consumption on whichever terms you choose.

Rita Duffy's paintings *Mother Ireland* (1989) and *Mother Ulster* (1989) offer wicked allegories of women's place in the authoritarian schemes of Gael and Loyalist poles. Duffy's women are excluded from the public sphere, and visibly colonized by external forces. A cross-eyed, spread-eagled Mother Ireland strains under the weight of a whole posse of babies, secured by an umbilical cord stretching from her brain to a grandiose Gothic cathedral; Mother Ulster's hand-held duster proclaims no surrender to domestic deviance, no matter that the world outside is literally collapsing in upon itself. Even their own kitchen utensils turn against them: the tools of this domestic sphere are savage instruments of torture. While tribal wars rage outside, women are confined to a forgotten outpost, the final frontier represented in Duffy's *Scullery* (no. 20, pl. VII).

Deirdre O'Connell's practice across drawing, sculpture and installation broadens the debate about how identity may or may not be constructed by challenging the built environment (nos. 6, 7, pl. III). Urban landscapes are territories where identity is restricted and suppressed. Invoking sometimes a parallel imperial past created by lost empires like Greece or Rome, O'Connell filters motifs of socialization through themes of containment or exclusion, encouraging readings of identity as a cultural complex, and as such reframing the old-style poles. Its immediate political resonance within the context of Northern Ireland is emblematic, but O'Connell's fluid treatment of the subject admits other readings. Architecture's neutral mantle is stripped off, and its constructs are scrutinized instead as tacit assertions of civic and public power.

Women artists in Ireland have long been visible. Mainie Jellett studied Cubism with André Lhote and Albert Gleize in Paris while the Free State was coming into being, and pioneered its practice within Ireland for the rest of her life.[9] Women were engaged in founding and organizing the Irish Exhibition of Living Art and Independent Artists. Although being visible is not in itself evidence of status, the quaint, if suspect, assumption that visual culture was somehow exempt from the exclusions and prejudices elsewhere in Irish society is still widely held, even if the view is patently refuted by the most cursory survey of public and corporate collections, or art books and catalogues.

Many women in this exhibition were themselves key players in devising and developing the conditions within culture and politics which turned the climate away from the dead traditions of the Cathleen principle, and towards the inclusive, wide-ranging

attitudes now being recognized within Irish culture.[10] Yet comparisons between the global context with which most engage as artists, and the cosmopolitan model imported by Jellett's generation, involve two radically different orders and ways of placing visual culture. "Looking in" or "looking out," to borrow Patrick Collins' words, no longer describes the opposition between a center and its subject, or between two poles of defining Irishness, but articulates the prospect of new cultural sittings, far outside the maws of history or geography.

Notes

1 See Yeats 1892; O'Casey 1925.

2 Songs such as *Kathleen Mavourneen*, (1835), composed by F.W. Crouch (1808-96), and *I'll Take You Home Again, Kathleen*, (1875), composed by Thomas Paine Westendorf (1848-1923).

3 Dublin 1971, pp. 11-12. O'Doherty exhibits as "Patrick Ireland," having changed his name as a protest against British policies in Ireland.

4 With the urinal entitled *Fountain* and signed "R. Mutt."

5 Dunne 1981, p. 922.

6 See Dublin 1980.

7 See Lippard 1984 and 1985.

8 "Oh, Kathleen ni Houlihan, your way's a thorny way !" Qtd. from O'Casey 1925, Act I, spoken by Seamus Shields. For a discussion on the role of medieval imagery in Maher's work, see Ruane forthcoming.

9 Arnold 1991.

10 Examples of women artist's involvement abound: Pauline Cummins with the Women Artists Action Group, Eilís O'Connell as a founder of the National Sculpture Factory, Mary FitzGerald as an editorial advisor to *Circa* art magazine, Gwen O'Dowd and Eithne Jordan as founders of the Visual Arts Centre, Louise Walsh through Out Art, Geraldine O'Reilly as a pioneer with community programs, Finola Jones through Dogbowl and Bones publishers, to mention a few.

Abbreviations

Arnold 1991
Arnold, Bruce. *Mainie Jellett and the Modern Movement in Ireland*. New Haven, 1991.

Dublin 1971
The Irish Imagination 1959-71. The Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington D.C./The Irish-American Cultural Institute, Dublin, 1971.

Dublin 1980
The Delighted Eye: Irish Painting and Sculpture of the Seventies. The Arts Council of Northern Ireland, Belfast; The Arts Council, Dublin, 1980.

Dunne 1981
Dunne, Aidan. "A Celtic Art ?" in *The Crane Bag* , vol. 5, no. 2, Dublin, 1981, pp. 920-924.

Lippard 1984
Lippard, Lucy. In *Circa*, no. 17, 1984.

Lippard 1985
Lippard, Lucy. *Divisions, Crossroads, Turns of Mind: Some New Irish Art*. Ireland-America Arts Exchange, 1985.

O'Casey 1925
O'Casey, Sean. *Two Plays: Juno and the Paycock* and *The Shadow of a Gunman*. New York, 1925 (premiered 1923).

Ruane forthcoming
Ruane, Medb. *Alice Maher: in conversation with Medb Ruane*. The Works Series. (Gandon Editions, forthcoming).

Yeats 1892
Yeats, W.B. *The Countess Kathleen and Various Legends and Lyrics*. London, 1892.



CLAUDE CERNUSCHI

Visual and Ideological Pluralism in Practice: Contemporary Irish Women Artists in Context

At a time when contemporary art historians, or academicians in general, are continuously forewarned against the potentially deleterious ramifications of categorization—as if categorizing an artist's work (or any object of culture) is, per force, to delimit that work within an authoritarian structure of thought—any interpretive study of contemporary Irish women artists faces, from the very outset, a variety of looming methodological challenges. As if the activities of historical or interpretive categorization were not problematic enough in our contemporary critical climate, the very subtitle of this exhibition, "Contemporary Works from Irish Women Artists," simply compounds the issue by providing its own, incremental combination of discrete, totalizing categories: "contemporary," "Irish," "women," "artists." The strict definitions and boundaries of each of these terms are not only open to interpretation and debate—requiring justification on their own terms, independently of the overall concept—but each and every term can also be effectively recombined with any other, and even further rescrambled so as to produce any number of different potential permutations. Or, the full title may be allowed to remain in complete form, but its interpretive emphasis can shift, if only implicitly, from one term to the other. In each case, the subject may be the same (assuming, of course, that agreement can be reached as to what the "real" subject actually is), but the proportional interpretive weight attributed to each of these categories may change accordingly.

The problem is all the more acute because the very argument against art historical categorization has been forcefully made by a number of feminist critics themselves, i.e. critics who have labeled categorization as a specifically masculine, authoritarian, and patriarchal mode of analysis.[1] Since the topic of this exhibition, after all, is women artists (and artists who frequently subscribe to a feminist agenda), these issues become all the more pressing. But for all the negative press categories have received in our contemporary intellectual climate, it must be said (in view of the above) that an object of culture being situated in any one category does not necessarily preclude that same object from being situated in any other category, or in any possible combination (or intersection) of categories. In effect, categories are not necessarily permanent or fixed in any determinist sense-i.e. as agents of authoritarian (or specifically male) control. On the contrary, categories can be both flexible and permeable, heuristic tools scholars may use to make interpretive sense of, or identity connections in, any designated body of material.

To be sure, categories often give the mistaken impression of cohesion within—or exaggerate the differences across—their preestablished borders;[2] and, moreover, it is easy to naturalize categories to the point of assuming (wrongly) that the characteristics they identify are no longer pre-prescribed by our own interpretive assumptions, but objective, self-declaring properties of the objects we study. These properties, in turn, can be used in a number of ways to sustain a variety of social and cultural prejudices, or to enforce political or ideological ends. These problems, in many ways, are inevitable. But, by the same token, it must be stressed that, without categories of any kind, no form of interpretation could be conceivable. It is not as if we impose categories upon objects of culture in order to make sense of them, or in order to enforce

NO. 18 (P. 18)
Rita Duffy
Becoming
1995
oil on wax paper
46 x 48 in.
Collection of the Artist, Belfast

a particular reading; it is, rather, that without categories, the making of sense and the possibility of reading would not occur.

If categories can (and often do) function as prescriptive rather than descriptive tools, it is, after all, because all interpretation is prescriptive as well as descriptive. In other words, categories may only have provisional rather than universal validity, but to categorize is an inevitable, inescapable aspect of the interpretive act. And critical awareness of or even self-consciousness about the inevitability of this proposition, moreover, does not make that proposition any less inevitable, or any less inescapable.

Since, in many respects, categories cannot be "lived with" or "lived without," a way to counterbalance their prescriptive nature is to place an object of inquiry into as many categories as possible. In this way, their potentially limiting or totalizing effect could be juxtaposed to, and forced to compete with, other (no less limiting or totalizing) categories, but whose cumulative impact may allow an object of investigation to be construed against a multiplicity of perspectives. Among these competing perspectives, scholars may decide, by means of trial and error, or on the basis of which interpretations they find most persuasive, or on the basis of their own ideological loyalties, which method of categorization is most conducive to their own interpretive purposes.

This, in many ways, is the organizational rationale underlying the exhibition *Re/Dressing Cathleen*: not only to expose the public to a rarely shown body of work in the United States, but also to allow the category of "contemporary Irish women artists" to be construed against a variety of interpretive backgrounds (or other categories)—aesthetic, historical, literary, social, political, etc.—each placing this same specific body of work within a different frame of reference. This, of course, is not to suggest that all investigators contribute a piece to an overall puzzle-i.e. a puzzle whose configuration, once every piece is in place, provides a picture which corresponds to a predetermined or complete whole. The suggestion, rather, is that the very total picture itself is continuously being changed or revised by the progressive incorporation of any single piece.

In view of the above, then, the purpose of this essay is to place the artists included in this exhibition in the context of contemporary Western artistic practice. In this way, the already complex terms "contemporary,"

"Irish," "women," and "artists" may sometimes recede (or gain in importance) as they intersect and collide with another set of categories, categories that are themselves no less complex than the ones to which they are being provisionally attached: "feminism," "neo-expressionism," "modernism," "post-modernism," "body art," "abstraction," "the figure," "landscape," and so on. In this essay, it will be against these frames of reference that the works in this exhibition will be interpreted.

The works of both Eithne Jordan (no. 15, pl. V, no. 16) and Rita Duffy (no. 17, pl. VI, nos. 18-20, pl. VII), for example, can easily be placed within the context of the so-called return to figural painting in the '80s. Given the conspicuously gestural application of paint and emphasis on issues of personal subjectivity frequently evidenced in recent figural painting, this mode was designated by most critics (and not without reason) as neo-expressionism[3] —a phenomenon broad and international enough to cross geographical lines from Germany (e.g. the work of Anselm Kiefer and Georg Baselitz) and Italy (e.g. Sandro Chia and Francesco Clemente) to the United States (e.g. Julian Schnabel and Susan Rothenberg) and Ireland itself (e.g. Patrick Graham, Patrick Hall, Brian Maguire).[4]

The "neo" of neo-expressionism was also closely associated with a postmodern rejection of two key ideas with which modernism had been closely aligned: the concepts of 1) artistic originality and 2) of the incremental theory of history.[5] By resurrecting a mode of representational painting whose first emergence dated from the first decade of the twentieth century, neo-expressionists were *ipso facto* questioning, first, the cardinal modernist directive to be original and, second, the very modernist premise that art moves only forward (say, from figuratio to abstraction), but never the other way. And by engaging in a neo-expressionist mode, Duffy and Jordan are not only positioning their works within postmodernism's generally anti-incremental agenda, but they are also, if only implicitly, challenging the widely held assumption—posited by a many feminist critics—that expressionism is an exclusively masculine artistic idiom.[6]

But neo-expressionism can take many forms.[7] It can focus primarily on the human face—as in the work of Jordan (or Baselitz and Clemente)—resurrecting the expressionist fascination with the introspective qualities of the portrait and self-portrait, as well as foregrounding the assumption that the immediacy of human emotive states can be directly translated through the rapid and spontaneous application of paint on a canvas surface. In Jordan's work of the late '80s, the heads occupy almost the entirety of the visual field, confronting their spectators directly, and leaving the audience with few objects or visual incidents to observe outside of the immediate frontality of these face-to-face confrontations. The heads, moreover, are generalized and unspecific, providing few clues or signals as to the identity and profession of Jordan's sitters. Communication, it seems, hinges exclusively on spectator's interpretation of gesture, form, color, and facial expression—not on the spectator's recognition of conventional signs or codified symbols.

In this way, the hieratic and disproportionately large heads of Jordan provide an instructive contrast to the less immediate images of Rita Duffy. Duffy's images also fall comfortably within the neo-expressionist rubric, but her more diversified technique juxtaposes contrasting areas of spontaneous, gestural brushwork with others of tighter, more controlled execution. In addition, Duffy counteracts Jordan's ostensible immediacy by suggesting a possible narrative to her images, but without bringing those narratives to fully resolved conclusions.

For instance, in Journey (no. 17, pl. VI), an elderly man (the artist's father) and young woman (the artist) share an interior space, yet the very identity of that space remains ambiguous, especially since the style, bordering on caricature, is deliberately crude. From the configuration of the windows, however, and the presence of a rear-view mirror and sun visor, one would be led to assume that the scene takes place inside a modern automobile. But the very posture of the young girl, and the unlikely presence of the piano (its diminutive scale notwithstanding), make any such reading problematic. In addition, the spatial as well as psychological relationship of the man to the young woman is no less clear. Their physical proximity suggests a relationship of some kind (that the sitters are actually father and daughter cannot be inferred from the painting itself), but their psychological remoteness reveals schism and bifurcation. The man's posture is self-absorbed and self-contained: his eyes are closed and he holds a religious sculpture to his cheek, underscoring his fervent connection to the Catholic faith; the young woman blows kisses (to her father?) through the window, but—paradoxically—turns away from him, striking the keys of an instrument not only too small to play, but an instru-



FIG. 1
Jörg Immendorff
Café Deutschland I
1978
oil on canvas
Courtesy of the Ludwig Collection, Aachen.
Photo: Anne Gold, Aachen

ment condemned to stay silent through the medium of paint.

On this account, the work seems to bespeak fragmentation: young versus old, male versus female, the internal experience of religion versus the declamatory activity of musical performance. The very nature and destination of the journey, moreover, also remains unclear; the car does not travel anywhere, nor is it driven by anyone. Yet one may conjecture that the journey of which Duffy speaks is a metaphorical rather than a literal one: not the nature of physical displacement per se, but an evocation of the human mind's potential to be absorbed by emotional states, or to provide individuals with the ability to move beyond the parameters of their own, immediate situation. But the sword cuts both ways: imagination can provide freedom and release, yet it also alienates one figure or one generation from another. In this sense, the work is comparable to Jörg Immendorff's *Café Deutschland* series (fig. 1), paintings wherein the fragmentation of a country (in this case, East and West Germany), or the opposition of two political regimes and ideologies (Capitalism and Communism), or the separation of two friends (Immendorff and fellow artist A. R. Penck), could also be represented in an equally metaphorical way.[8]

In *Becoming* (no. 18), however, Duffy chooses to focus on a single figure: a woman engaging in the incongruous act of straining a human fetus. The painting, arguably, is also metaphorical, but, because of its ambiguity, the piece may be construed in a potentially more disturbing way. Feminists have long associated the rearing of children and the domestic activity of preparing food with the marginalized and disenfranchised position of women in patriarchal cultures. But both activities, though connected by their identification with domestic activity, become disturbingly incongruent when combined. The use of the strainer to cradle a baby is blatantly incompatible with its traditional function as a cooking utensil; its womb-like, spherical shape may (at first sight) denote the protectiveness of a baby basin, but its very function to prepare food (when that food is a human child) violently alters its shape to suggest a coffin. The unnatural redness of the baby, moreover, is the chromatically brightest section of the painting. Yet this same brightness is ambiguous: it may suggest the beginning of life (i.e. the very moment after birth) or, conversely, the absence of life (i.e. if the baby has been either prepared for consumption or if it was either born prematurely or aborted).

In view of Duffy's bent towards the metaphorical, *Becoming* could be interpreted in terms of the politics of abortion, an issue in which the artist herself acknowledges great interest, and whose ramifications are inflammatory enough to polarize a culture to a fever pitch. What is perhaps most disturbing about the work, however, is the facial features of the woman: features betraying fatigue and oppression, on the one hand, but, on the other, little recognition of the implications of the act that has just occurred (i.e. either the birth or death of a child)—as if the artist wanted to suggest that the woman's plight has been so burdensome as to desensitize her to the very event before her. Duffy herself expressed sympathy for the difficulty of her mother's domestic situation in a recent interview, as well as her cognizance of alarming instances of child abuse in Ireland, two concerns that, in a variety of ways, inform her general body of work.

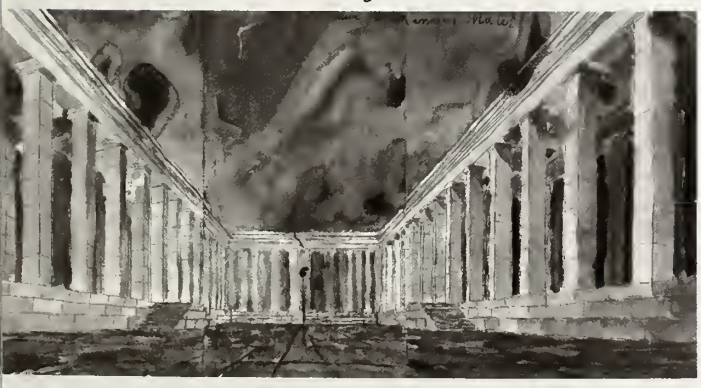
But if *Becoming* is an attempt to address the politics of abortion, Duffy's position is a highly ambivalent one, or, rather, one whose stance cannot necessarily be divined from the visual information provided by the painting itself. Like *Journey*, *Becoming* coalesces and juxtaposes mixed signals: life and death, sympathy for the woman as well as sympathy for the child. The title, also, seems profoundly ironic: what exactly is "becoming"? Is it the woman, the child, or both? And if so, how?

As in *Journey* or *Becoming*, a similar set of contrasts is also evidenced in *Dancer* (no. 19), a painting whose lone

figure seems, despite the mobility implied in the title, restricted in movement. The figure's restriction is made all the more poignant by virtue of a circular form surrounding her body (a device used to train young children to dance traditional Irish folk dances without looking at their feet), as well as by the presence of a number of sculptured images of the Virgin floating above her head. This motif may be a reference to reported incidents of moving statues of the Virgin in remote Irish churches during the mid-'80s. But, by virtue of their contrast to the dancer, the mobility of the statues exacerbate the effect of the dancer's constriction. The painting, again, visualizes contrast: the dancer, who should move, does not; the statues, which should not, do. The traditional folk dance, moreover, ostensibly a symbol of national identity and pride for adults, can become potentially oppressive for a child forced to partake in an activity whose nationalistic and symbolic implications she may be too young to understand. As in *Journey*, Duffy seems to strike oppositions between the religious and the secular, the liberating and the oppressive, the actual and the imaginative, but without bringing her audience any closer to a final resolution.

In this way, the irony and ambiguity of Duffy's work can also be compared to the irony underlying some of Anselm Kiefer's paintings.[9] In his series of images dedicated "To the Unknown Painter" (fig. 2), Kiefer celebrates the artists persecuted and labeled degenerate by the Nazi regime. Yet his images are profoundly ironic insofar as Kiefer paradoxically chose to use Nazi architecture specifically designed to glorify fallen German soldiers for his own, radically different intent of celebrating persecuted artists. Like Kiefer, Duffy uses images in personal, and profoundly ironic ways. The images, then, cannot be read at face value, nor do they purport to rely—as Jordan's do—exclusively on their immediate physical or material properties for communication. But although Duffy and Jordan's paintings display a variety of different interpretive and formal concerns (from Jordan's hieratic and frontal heads to the more ambiguous, narrative-oriented paintings of Duffy), their formal properties and subjective connotations can be effectively labeled neo-expressionist.

FIG. 2
Anselm Kiefer
German, b. 1945
To the Unknown Painter
(Dem unbekannter Maler)
1982
watercolor
Courtesy, Anthony d'Offay Gallery, London.
Photo: Prudence Cuming Associates Ltd.



In spite of their differences, however, both artists can be contrasted to Geraldine O'Reilly (nos. 8-12, pl. IV, nos. 13, 14). O'Reilly's works tend to reject the gestural trace of the artist's hand as evocative of creative and subjective psychology, as well as the use of unresolved narratives as a method of juxtaposing opposites, in favor of the language found in the letters and journals of Irish emigrants. Although language creates more of a stable frame of reference for communication than gestural applications of paint or fragmented narratives, O'Reilly also uses language to reveal fragmentation: the journals of immigrants imply the departure of individuals from one geographical location to another, from one culture to another, as well as the explicit separation of various members of families from each other. Thus, although thematic connections could easily be drawn between the work of O'Reilly and Duffy, the strategies by which these same concerns are translated through their works are radically different: some through expressionist technique and ambiguous narrative, and others through language and conventional signs.

Another way by which O'Reilly counteracts the neo-expressionist belief in the primacy of the artist's touch as a vehicle of communication, or in the human face as locus of subjective identity, is a work entitled *Relics* (no. 14) (part of the *Land Marks Series*) which depicts the multiple faces of individuals who had been killed in Northern Ireland. These faces were appropriated from photographs originally published in a now defunct journal entitled *Magill Magazine*; O'Reilly collected these photographs with no apparent aesthetic purpose in mind until she decided to create a large print combining all the disparate heads in a single visual field.[10] At a distance, *Relics* is reminiscent of calligraphy, or of abstract patterns unrecognizable to the naked eye. It is only from a closer vantage point

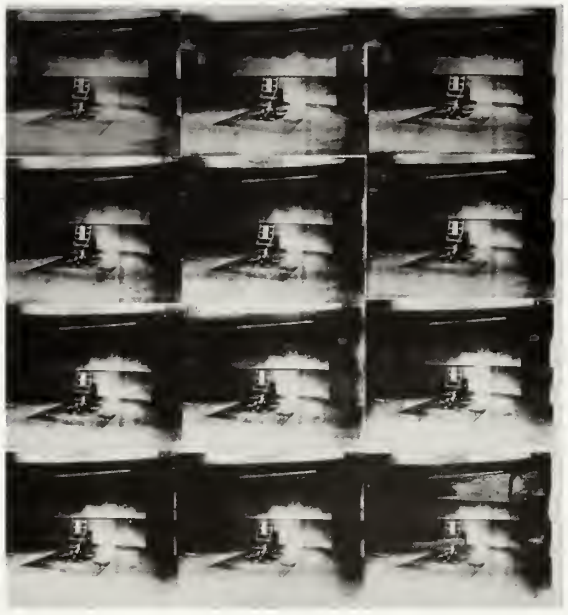


FIG. 3
Andy Warhol
U.S., 1928-87
Red Disaster (first panel)
1963
silk screen; ink on synthetic polymer paint on linen
Charles H. Bayley Picture and Painting Fund
Courtesy, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 1981.161
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that its actual subject becomes recognizable: human heads repeated consistently over the entire surface of the work. But recognizable is a strange word to use. Although the heads have distinctive features, and are thus clearly differentiated from one another, their outlines are so simplified and schematic as to approximate caricature. The repetitive use and dense congestion of the faces, moreover, tend to neutralize their individuality even further. As O'Reilly herself put it, this particular strategy was meant to evoke the "awful repetition of events."[11] O'Reilly's subtle evocation of death by means of repetition and de-individualization recalls the issues raised by Andy Warhol's disaster series.[12] During the '60s, Warhol frequently used the repeated image of a car crash, an atomic explosion, or an electric chair (fig. 3) to underscore how the modern media's mechanical, repetitive, and impersonal ways of disseminating information actually desensitize contemporary audiences to the reality of events, even events as tragic as death. To get his point across, however, Warhol uses the very same effect that he ostensibly denounces: impersonality and repetition. O'Reilly's de-individualized heads articulate a similar strategy: one that draws attention not only to the tragic loss of life in Northern Ireland, but also to the equally tragic ways by which mechanical means of reproduction tend to deflate the emotive impact of each, individual death.

Another artist whose thematic concerns intersect those of Warhol is Finola Jones, although her own artistic proclivities tend more towards the ironic rather than the serious side of Pop art's aesthetic coin. In the installation piece *LUSCIOUS—(an aesthetic view of culture)* (no. 45, pl. XV), Jones affixes small figurines, dolls, teddy bears, cartoon characters, religious saints, super heroes, or other popular figures on wide expanses of gallery walls. *LUSCIOUS*, like O'Reilly's *Relics*, looks considerably different depending on the spectator's relative vantage point. From a distance, the identity of the individual figures is unclear, and, given the absence of any specific focal point or visual centers of attention, it is the overall configuration that demands the spectator's attention. At close range, however, the individual identities of the figurines become clearer, but the lack of focal points still frustrates any effort on the part of the audience to make hierarchical distinctions on either thematic or visual grounds. We are forced, it seems, to think of a figure of the Madonna, St. Francis, or an angel as equivalent to ones of Bart Simpson, Donald Duck, or a Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle.

On the one hand, of course, LUSCIOUS is undeniably humorous, sarcastic, and tongue-in-cheek. But the piece has its serious side as well. It recalls the fundamental paradigm shift provoked by the Dadaist movement in general, and Marcel Duchamp's ready-mades in particular: ordinary, utilitarian, mass-produced objects exhibited in the 1910s and '20s in contexts conventionally reserved for works of art. The "artist," in effect, no longer created a work of "art" on the basis of subjective "inspiration" or extraordinary "talent," but selected prefabricated objects irrespective of established norms of "beauty" or "quality." The point, coming as the works did after the carnage of World War I, was to question not only the fundamental validity of age-old concepts such as "beauty," "quality," or "talent"; the point was to question the very validity of art itself.[13] By the advent of Pop art in the '60s, moreover, the collision between "high art" and popular culture was in full force. Warhol exhibited paintings of Campbell Soup cans; Roy Lichtenstein of comic strips; and James Rosenquist of advertising billboards. The "aesthetic" status of these pieces was no longer the issue; the issue was to find effective

ways by which art could respond meaningfully to the pervasive dominance of advertising, television, and popular entertainment in modern culture.[14]

LUSCIOUS—(an aesthetic view of culture), of course, falls very comfortably within this context. What is most intriguing about the piece, however, can be construed from its subtitle, an addition which may be interpreted in two ways. "An aesthetic view of culture" may refer to studying cultures in terms of the art they produce. Ostensibly, *LUSCIOUS* is a site-specific piece: each time the work is exhibited, Jones uses objects purchased in the surrounding local environment itself. An intimate connection results, therefore, between the work and the culture in which the piece is exhibited: culture, quite literally, is viewed aesthetically. Or, "an aesthetic view of culture" may refer to questioning what a culture means by aesthetics, and to what extent the category of aesthetics is itself culturally determined.

By placing religious figurines, teddy bears, or action figures on a wall, Jones is quite literally violating their original utilitarian or religious function, forcing us to rethink their status as "art." Art, however, is a tenuous term, because the original function and identity of the objects exhibited can never be fully denied, nor should they be denied since the piece's effect, arguably, stems from the tension implicit in displaying functional objects as "art," and from making art out of functional objects. In this way, *LUSCIOUS* is reminiscent of the work of Jeff Koons or Haim Steinbach,[15] who also display ordinary utilitarian objects as well as figures from popular culture as art, although they generally do not affix objects directly to walls, as does Jones, but place them on pedestals (which, of course, is tantamount to doing the same thing).

The issue raised by the works of Jones, Koons, and Steinbach is that "art" is not a given, inherent, or self-declaring property of any object. That quality is contingent on context: a Bart Simpson doll in the hands of a child is a toy; in the middle of *LUSCIOUS*, it is an integral part of a work of art; but if the Bart Simpson doll should fall away from *LUSCIOUS*, be picked up by a child and taken home, it becomes a toy again. The status of art, therefore, is not an internal, self-declaring property of any object, it is, rather, a property conferred by an audience, a property conferred by a culture.[16] Analogously, if all that survived from our era were Bart Simpson and Ninja Turtle dolls, a future archaeologist may treasure these items in the same way as we treasure artifacts from lost civilizations, artifacts that, in their culture of origin, may have been considered nothing more than trifles. In this manner, the work of Jones and Steinbach force us to question strict distinctions between art and non-art, between the profound and the trivial, and between the sublime and the ridiculous.

What remains ambiguous, however, or, more accurately, what cannot necessarily be divined from the pieces themselves, is the position of the artist herself on this very same problem. Is the ambiguous relation between art and non-art to be welcomed as an example of the equalitarian democratization of contemporary existence, or, conversely, is it to be decried as the inevitable commercialization and banalization of modern culture? Along the same lines, Jones does not physically create her figurines; she purchases them. Again, how are we to interpret this choice? Is it to be construed as a glorification of collective factory production, or, conversely, as a denunciation of the de-personalization and de-individualization of contemporary culture?[17] These are the questions that Jones, through the ostensibly banal figures of Bart Simpson and Ninja Turtles, leaves us to ponder.

Others, however, chose a different path. Many artists and critics came to believe that Pop art could not escape the very trivialization it exposed, and that even the interpretive assumptions underlying much of neo-expressionism were seriously flawed. The return of figurative painting may have allowed certain artists to indulge in subjective expression, or to practice ways of making that counterbalanced the trivialization of experience in a contemporary mediated culture, but the alleged impulsiveness of gestural painting provided, it was often argued, an illusion, rather than the actual realization, of immediacy.[18] However much they would have denied it, practitioners of both expressionism and neo-expressionism manipulate culturally mediated devices of handling—devices that are themselves time-bound and culture-specific—not devices whose meanings are self-declaring and transparent independently of an interpretive background or frame of reference.

To circumvent the mediation and aestheticization implicit in all artistic practices, some artists preferred to use, as their medium, the human body itself. The rise of Happenings, Performance, and Event art from the

late '50s onward comprised attempts to question the legitimacy of the very category of aesthetics, or, to put it another way, to dissolve the barriers between the categories of "art" and "non-art." Any distinction between the space "of the work" and the space "around the work" was made as fluid and permeable as possible; the activity "within the work" was made to approximate activity "outside the work;" and the chronological duration "of the work" was meant to equal chronological duration "outside the work." Using the human body as a medium, moreover, was a deliberate attempt to break down the barrier between art and life, or performer and audience,[19] achieving an immediacy unimaginable to artists even as impulsive as the expressionists or neo-expressionists themselves.

It soon became clear, however, that even the unadorned or unaesthetic use of the human body—despite its claims to having achieved transparent presentation rather than mediated representation—could not ultimately escape the trap of mediation itself. This argument was made all the more forcefully by feminists whose agenda was to undermine the uncritical view of the body as natural sign. Many feminist critics argued that the meaning of the body is hardly natural but—at all times—already predetermined from the very outset by the associations attached to gender in our culture.[20] The body, in other words, was no less susceptible to interpretive manipulation than anything else—but was perhaps even more dangerous given its ability to pass itself off as "natural" with greater efficiency than conventional symbols or arbitrary signs. As a result, a number of feminist artists began to use the body to problematize, not only the assumption that physicality provides an unmediated avenue towards natural signification, but the ways by which the body is, from the outset, invested with a number of gender stereotypes as well.

In *Interior Scroll* of 1975, Carolee Schneemann marked her body aesthetically by painting it, confusing the space of actual physicality with the space of aesthetics. Moreover, she proceeded to read a scroll that she slowly removed from inside her vagina, thus not only turning the internal into the external, but willfully transforming the female cavity into its opposite: a near-phallic, masculine form.[21] Vito Acconci raised similar issues, but in reverse. In a 1971 video performance piece entitled *Conversions*, Acconci burned the hair off his chest with a candle, and proceeded to pull on his pectoral muscles in an effort to simulate female breasts—again attempting to reverse gender roles, to confuse the ease with which culture inevitably imposes and fixes meanings on human bodies, and to undermine the view of physicality as a natural sign.

In an analogous way, in their collaborative video piece *Sounding the Depths* (no. 46, pl. XVI), Louise Walsh and Pauline Cummins complicate any attempt to construe the body as natural by superimposing filmed images upon a naked female body. Not only does this work situate the "natural" body within a series of intermediary, mediated representations—i.e. the superimposition of images of the body upon the body itself, and those images themselves being filtered through the medium of film, thus putting the audience at a variety of stages of removal from the "original" body-but the very meaning and representation of this "original" body is quite literally turned inside/out.

By superimposing projections of open mouths upon the outside of female bodies, however, Walsh and Cummins not only violate our expectations of inside versus outside relationships, but reverse our assumptions of the female body as a fertile, nurturing, and protective entity. The images, then, encourage the audience to rethink conventional stereotypes about women—namely, the proclivity of patriarchal culture to relegate their status to the tired clichés of either domestic reproductive vessels or threatening "femme fatales." The opening of the superimposed mouth, moreover, revealing menacing teeth and protruding tongue, also suggests the age-old idea of the vagina dentata, a primal male sexual fear. In this regard, the work not only attempts to problematize the idea of the body as a natural sign, but attempts to draw our attention to the social stereotypes about women active in a patriarchal society.

What is ironic about the work of Cummins and Walsh, however, is that, in the process, they also attempt to subvert the aesthetic sources and prototypes upon which they themselves rely, sources and prototypes that are, more often then not, images created by men which do visual violence to the female body. Walsh and Cummins's video, arguably, plays off the images of René Magritte (whose *The Rape* superimposes a naked female body upon a woman's face [fig. 4]), or Willem de Kooning (whose *Woman* of 1953 superimposes a female face on a woman's body)—images which use surrealist strategies of surprise and shock, again, either to commodify the female body as the locus of male desire, or to give visual form to primal male sexual fears.

By the same token, however, one should be careful not to construe these ideological stances as representing

meanings or inflections inherent to the images themselves. These meanings, rather, are critical interpretations that we bring to the works ourselves as already biased and committed spectators—not inherent properties of the art work itself. After all, we would (arguably) come to *Sounding the Depths* with widely different interpretive assumptions had we, as members of the audience, been foretold that the video had been created by men rather than women. In such an instance, we would be far more likely to construe the work as politically analogous to the paintings of Magritte and de Kooning; just as if we had been foretold, conversely, that *The Rape* or *Woman* were created by women artists, we would be far more likely to construe those images as feminist critiques (rather than tacit endorsements) of patriarchal ideology. Indeed, to construe ideological or political stances as inherent properties of, rather than meanings retrospectively attached to, works of art would, per force, imply reinvoking the very concepts of natural (rather than socially constructed) signs that feminist critical and interpretive theory is attempting to question in the first place.



FIG. 4
René Magritte
French, 1898-1967
The Rape (Le Viol)
oil on canvas
The Menil Collection, Houston, acc. no. 76-06 DJ
Photo: Paul Hester, Houston

To stress this point is not to argue that there is no such thing as a patriarchal or feminist work of art. It is only to argue that labels such as "patriarchal" or "feminist" are themselves assigned or attached to works of art after the fact—i.e. meanings that are contingent on the ideological loyalties of interpreters who construe works of art against a host of preassumptions and presuppositions about what such labels mean and how they signify—not inherent meanings of the works themselves. And depending on what those assumptions or presuppositions are, what may be labeled "feminist" in one context may be labeled "patriarchal" in another, or vice-versa.

Along similar lines, another artist who seriously questions interpretive assumptions about the status of the female body as a natural sign is Kathy Prendergast. In a series of works entitled *Body Maps* (nos. 21-28, pl. VIII, nos. 29-30, pl. IX, no. 31), Prendergast plays on the long established association between women's bodies and the earth, the fertility of which has often stood as a metaphor for the fertility of the female body (e.g. in expressions such as "mother earth," "mother nature," "virgin spring," or in female allegorical representations of sovereign nations). But this ostensibly positive and flattering association cuts both ways. Just as the land can symbolize fertile abundance or nationalistic pride, it can also symbolize a resource to be tapped, cultivated, or even exhausted beyond repair. And just as a body can be subject to abuse and control, the land can be used, colonized, and exploited for political, military, or economic purposes. Those purposes, in turn, may or may not be legitimate, especially when they involve unequal power relationships: i.e. men/women or colonial/colonized nations. Prendergast not only plays on the similarity of the land to the body, but the very subtitles attached to the series (e.g. *To Alter a Landscape* [no. 26], or *To Control a Landscape— Irrigation* [no. 28, pl. VIII]) suggest the extent to which the conventional, allegedly positive identification of woman with the land, can hold darker, more sinister connotations.

Prendergast's work, in this respect, intersects a set of interpretive concerns exhibited by recent earthworks artists, artists whose medium is not oil on canvas, but the actual, unadulterated, and unadorned materials found in the natural environment: earth, rock, vegetation, crystals, etc.[22] But just as these artists raise a host of collective environmental issues (e.g. how the land

is being used, organized, exploited, etc.), this body of work may be construed in a variety of ways, especially if one decides to interpret it in combination with a critical approach to (rather than a tacit acceptance of) the metaphor of the earth as female.[23] From this perspective, earthwork or environmental artists may not be displaying a set of communal concerns, as much as articulating different strategies that may themselves be divided along gender lines.

Using the land to fashion a statement—e.g. on the obsolete nature of the art object, or to create works whose very gargantuan scale undermine the commercial practices of the art market, or whatever other issue—may have widely different interpretive ramifications depending on the artist's own assumptions about that land. And if those assumptions are inflected by an artist's gender, they will invariably impact the act of interpretation. Indeed, however much male or female earthwork artists may be raising similar issues pertaining to our culture's physical or philosophical relationship to the earth, those issues may affect male and female artists differently insofar as female artists may be harboring feelings of co-identity between themselves and that very same earth. This, of course, is not to suggest that these feelings are themselves not culturally constructed, or that they are not predicated on an entire set of preestablished interpretive stances; it only means that these feelings inform the works of artists like Prendergast or Ana Mendietta (who inscribed her own silhouette into the earth in number of pieces in the late '70s and early '80s) in a way they would not inform the works of male earthworks artists such as Robert Smithson, Robert Morris, or Michael Heizer. The difference is that, for female artists, any manipulation of, or incursion on, the land may signify a manipulation of, or an incursion on, their own image.

For these reasons, it may be instructive to include a discussion of media in this essay, or, more accurately, of the potential interpretive ramifications of the use of different media. For example, if Mendietta used the materials of the land itself in order to inscribe the outline of her own image in the earth, one could argue that, implicit in this choice, is a particular congruity between meaning and form: namely, that the female form (as a metaphor for the earth) is outlined by means of the earth itself, not by means of any other medium. Prendergast's work, however, could not be more different. Although the visual outline of the female form is no less present than in Mendietta's work, and though the identification of the female with the earth is no less active, Prendergast's calculating technique and precise draftsmanship can almost be characterized as deliberately "artless," a quality she shares with Finola Jones (no. 45). This, of course, is not to deny Prendergast's images (any more than Jones') the status of art, or to claim that the images do not rely on aesthetic choices or conventions, it is only to suggest that the careful execution of her pieces (in contrast to the purposefully "personal" gestural execution of neo-expressionist artists such as Duffy [no. 17, pl. VI, nos. 18-20, pl. VII] and Jordan [no. 15, pl. V, no. 16]) invokes modes of representation usually associated with architectural plans or map-making.

If this particular (almost impersonal) mode of execution deliberately relinquishes the idiosyncratic, ostensibly "psychologically-charged," mode of notation with which expressionism is allegedly invested, it also raises issues comparable to those raised by the work of Geraldine O'Reilly. If O'Reilly intended *Relics* (no. 14) to foreground the way cumulative experiences (even the cumulative experience of death) de-personalizes human life and de-sensitizes an audience to even the most tragic of events, the artist nonetheless uses modes of representation which reproduce the very same kinds of experiences. O'Reilly, in effect, like Warhol before her, chooses to use the very same modes of representation whose effects she criticizes.

Prendergast—arguably—is no different. Unlike Mendietta, who uses the earth to outline her own silhouette on the earth, forging an even closer co-identity between woman and the fertility of nature, Prendergast's work approximates the more mechanical, impersonal technique typical of geological diagrams, architectural blue prints, or topographical maps. Maps, to be sure, are useful tools; they outline geographical or political divisions, they provide logistical points of reference, and help individuals find their way in unfamiliar surroundings. To Prendergast's mind, however, maps can also naturalize relationships of dominance and control. A territory can be colonized, arbitrarily partitioned, bought, sold, exploited, and so on, often in ways that have little to do with its natural topography, with the traditions of its indigenous inhabitants, with its local distribution of wealth, with its economic or cultural centers of activity, etc. Yet it is those very same sets of arbitrary relations and enforced political solutions that maps often tend to obfuscate and naturalize. The map, in other words, gives the illusion that the political divisions of the world are fixed and set in stone, geographical inevitabilities rather than the contingent

results of continual political jostling and renegotiation. This issue, in fact, is of central relevance to Ireland itself, a country colonized by the British Empire and also victim to being partitioned, divided, and subdivided by an external power whose economic and political priorities are in direct conflict with those of its indigenous population. The same, Prendergast seems to intimate, is true of the female body. Its prescribed social role, its proclivity to be exploited and controlled, is arbitrary rather than natural; it is a property—to follow the analogy—of the map, not of the natural terrain. Yet in making this statement, Prendergast appropriates the very same weapons of those whose intentions her purpose it is to undermine (a strategy comparable to that of Geraldine O'Reilly).

Along different lines, Eilís O'Connell (no. 39, pl. XIII, nos. 40-44) also plays with the dual associations between the female body and the earth. Her abstracted yet conspicuously organic sculptures swell and undulate in a manner highly reminiscent of the human form. Such associations, O'Connell insists, are directly indebted to her carving technique; sculpture, she states, is "much more about the body when you carve. Your body creeps into it, because you're using the movement of your body to take it out." On this account, one can infer that *In the Roundness of Being* (no. 41) is directly related to specifically feminine configurations. Such associations, moreover, are even more pronounced in works such as *To Swell the Gourd* (no. 39, pl. XIII) or *Cathoid* (no. 42, pl. XIV), which make direct references to female anatomy in general, and to female sexuality, in particular. In this sense, O'Connell seems to be celebrating female physicality and fertility rather than calling attention to the ways in which patriarchal culture projects primal masculine sexual fears onto the female body (as Walsh and Cummins do). Similarly, the work of O'Connell can be no less effectively contrasted to the way Prendergast chooses to approximate the female body to a mapped and exploited colonized space.

Feminist interventions in contemporary art practice, therefore, rarely partake of, or reflect, a single formal or iconographical point of view—even if those interventions are often informed by the same general ideology or political agenda. In some cases, the stereotypes often attached to female sexuality in a predominantly patriarchal society can be the object of feminist ideological critique (e.g. Cummins and Walsh or Prendergast), or, in other cases (e.g. O'Connell), those very same stereotypes can be usurped, divested of their original (i.e. negative) connotations, and made to celebrate the very principles they were made to denigrate in the first place.

But O'Connell's stress on physicality, it must be said, is connected as much to the land as to the female body. The sculptures, in many ways, are also meant to evoke the forms of geological specimens—specimens which, in turn, reflect not just nature as a general, abstract concept, but also convey the specific ways in which (and cultural traditions by which) these same natural formations were integrated in rural Irish dwellings. Just as the female body is associated with the earth, O'Connell invests the archaeological remains of Ireland's pre-historic sites with a powerful human presence. The visual properties of those same specimens, then, not only inform the aesthetic decisions underlying O'Connell's sculptures, but also carry nationalistic overtones whose more subtle correlations are easily overlooked if an investigator decides to focus exclusively on O'Connell's evocations of the body at the expense of other meanings.

By allowing the body to reflect geology, and geology to approximate indigenous aesthetic traditions and specific geographical landmarks, moreover, O'Connell's work reinscribes and revalidates the body's very potential to connect with the land that Prendergast had criticized as an instrument of authoritarian control. For O'Connell, the body's connection, not just to nature, but to an indigenous, local landscape, sidesteps the problematic issue of the body-as-colonized space that Prendergast was at such pains to expose. "In general," O'Connell states, "I am definitely trying to make some kind of statement about where I am from."[24] For O'Connell, then, referencing the land or the body carries few nefarious connotations in this specific context—used, as it is here, to stress one's origins, rather than to draw attention to way the land or body is vulnerable to social, economic, or political pressure. O'Connell, it seems, is precariously walking on a tightrope between the general (the idea that physicality can function as a universal, transcultural mode of communication) and the particular (the idea that the specific forms evidenced in her sculptures are, of necessity, grounded in some kind of nationalistic consciousness); it is only by connecting one idea so intimately to the other (the body with the land) that she has miraculously managed to keep her balance.

Along similar lines, in *Point of Observation* (no. 6), and *Repository II* (no. 7, pl. III), Deirdre O'Connell (no relation to Eilís O'Connell) also focuses on the image of the land, not so much as metaphor for the human

body, but as metaphor for the nation state of Ireland, in order to foreground its potential to stand as a fortress—a secluded and protective entity rather than one susceptible to exploitation and control. It is significant to underscore, therefore, how the same symbol (the land), or the same sets of interpretive associations (comparing the land to the female body), may have a plurality of often contradictory meanings depending on which artist one chooses to investigate. For Prendergast, those associations have negative ramifications, while for Deirdre O'Connell and Eilís O'Connell, those same associations have strongly positive political ones. The body or the land, therefore, do not have fixed meanings acting independently of an artist's manipulation of signs and symbols according to her own interpretive assumptions and ideological commitments.

The architectural configurations of Deirdre O'Connell's work, in fact, also find echoes in another series created by Geraldine O'Reilly from the *Land Marks Series: Strongholds* (no. 8), which also evoke both the isolation (but also the pride of the inhabitants) of the island of Ireland. Yet the assimilation of architecture to the land is never complete: however much the island can be approximated to the fortress, the two still betray a contrast, if only implicitly, between the natural and the cultural. The two concepts, in other words, can be compared and associated, but they can never merge.

A similar precarious combination of the natural and cultural can also be found in the work of Alice Maher, whose *Berry Dress* (no. 32, pl. X) and *Bee Dress* (no. 34, pl. XI) also juxtapose natural fruit, or the natural (though dead) bodies of bees, with a key cultural marker of femininity: the dress. And unlike Eilís O'Connell or Prendergast, who refer to femininity by suggesting the immediate physicality of the body, Maher suggests it through articles that normally hide or obscure this very same physicality: external, inanimate clothing. But, by the same token, Maher deliberately violates our own expectations about the utilitarian function of external clothing: instead of clothing that we may construe as comfortable, protective, and sheltering, we are confronted with organic material whose close proximity to our bodies we would, most likely, find exceedingly repulsive.

The reliance on such discrepancies, or on our sense of physical discomfort, is undeniably indebted to Dadaist or Surrealist prototypes, yet Maher's inclusion of natural matter also relates her work to that of more contemporary performance artists who have also used animals (sometimes alive or sometimes dead) in their own pieces. In *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare*, for example, Joseph Beuys covered his head in gold leaf, tied metal and felt soles to his feet, and proceeded to explain works of art (which were hanging from the gallery wall) to a dead hare he was cradling in his arms.[25] In Beuys' performance, the duality between nature and culture, humanity and animals, life and death is suggested no less than in the work of Maher. Also worth mentioning in this regard are the performances of Mark Thompson particularly a piece where Thompson removed a queen bee from its hive, placed it on his head, only to wait as the rest of the hive swarmed him in search of their queen. Within minutes, Thompson's head and entire upper torso was covered with bees, a visual effect not altogether different from Maher's *Bee Dress*.

Maher's proclivity to reverse associations is also evidenced in *Thorn House* (no. 33), a sculpture whose thorns evoke the potential of physical harm or threat. In this way, Maher's work recalls Lucas Samaras' (fig. 5) strategy of adhering pins and needles to small box-like sculptures, forcing the spectator to combine the sheltering and protective associations we usually attach to the private space of the box to the threat of pain we invariably associate with the pins and needles. Yet these thorns, as in Samaras' pieces, are made to conform to an architectonic space: in this case, the architectural configuration of a house—a structure, again, whose initial function, ironically, is sheltering and protective. Thus, if O'Reilly or Deirdre O'Connell's architectural references are meant to evoke the impregnability of fortresses, Maher's work may be interpreted along similar lines. But, by the same token, one is made to wonder as to whether the function of the fortress is to protect or to entrap. Just as the associations of the body with the land can accommodate both positive or negative associations, so can the fortress. A fortress can keep intruders out, as much as it can keep captives inside, of predetermined spaces; its spatial configurations, therefore, can evoke both comfort and constraint, and, as a result, its meaning is again open to our interpretation and construal.

Another artist whose work manipulates different materials to evoke a variety of meanings is Mary FitzGerald. In *Spine* (no. 37) and *Heart* (no. 38), FitzGerald uses large expanses of fabric (mostly

velvet) to refer to the domestic activities of women: making beds, setting tables, cleaning clothes, and so on. By allowing the cloth to hang from natural points of suspension, thereby allowing the material to behave as it would naturally under the force of gravity, FitzGerald echoes the work of post-minimalist artists such as Robert Morris, Richard Serra, Eva Hesse, and Lynda Benglis—who also use pliant and malleable materials, and whose sculptures allow the inherent properties of those materials to be evidenced in the work's final form.[26]

Yet FitzGerald intentionally violates these relatively sedate surfaces by the inclusion of fish hooks and steel bolts which encourage the viewer to project emotive resonances on the otherwise inanimate materials. Instead of allowing materials to function literally (as many of the post-minimalists do) FitzGerald projects specific meanings and associations onto those materials. Recovering from a serious spinal injury after a car accident, FitzGerald saw these works as evocative of feelings of illness and vulnerability. On this account, the hooks and bolts suggest tears and damages in need of repair in the same way as stitches tie skin around a wound; and, in view of FiztGerald's accident, one may conjecture that cloth, in this particular case, becomes another surrogate (or metaphor) for the human body. The use of malleable material is also reminiscent of the sculptures of Joseph Beuys, who frequently used felt to communicate sensations of warmth and insulation. His use of this material, in fact, was (as in the case of FitzGerald) also motivated by biographical events: an aviator during World War II, Beuys was shot down on the Russian front, only to have been ostensibly rescued by Tartars who wrapped his body in fat and felt to preserve heat and facilitate healing.[27] Beuys, moreover, also fashioned works of art from felt (designed in the form of clothing [fig. 6]) which he suspended in mid-air and allowed to hang naturally,



FIG. 5
Lucas Samaras
Greek (active in U.S.), b. 1936
Untitled Box No. 3
1963
wood, pine, rope and stuffed bird
Gift of the Howard and Jean Lipman Foundation, Inc., acc. no. 66.36. Collection of Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, Photo: Jerry L. Thompson



FIG. 6
Joseph Beuys
German, 1921-85
Felt Suit
1970
Philadelphia Museum of Art: Gift of the Friends of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, acc. no. '71-41-9ab



FIG. 7
Barnett Newman
U.S., 1905-70
Onement, III
1949
oil on canvas
The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Slifka. Photograph ©1997 The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

characteristics which—in their general appearance and in their suggestion of the human body—also anticipate FitzGerald's pieces.

FitzGerald's work, moreover, can also be described as alternating between abstraction and figuration in a rather singular manner. Neither her materials nor shapes can be said to copy nature in an illusionistic or iconic way; nor are the hooks used purely literally. Yet the ways in which FitzGerald organizes the shapes and manipulates found objects in her sculptures suggest a human body in various states of injury and harm. These meanings, again, are not objective properties of the materials or objects that she uses (i.e. velvet or fish hooks); they are, rather, meanings that we attach to the works after the fact, and in light of the interests and intentions we assume were motivating their inclusion in FitzGerald's creations.

A similar vacillation between abstraction and figuration can be discerned in *Deluge* (no. 35, pl. XII) and *Red Sea* (no. 36), two works whose general configuration can be construed as abstract, but whose titles encourage representational associations. The gestural activity in *Deluge*, as well as its general color scheme, suggest an apocalyptic landscape, and, as such, the work reinvokes the issues of vulnerability central to *Heart* and *Spine*. But vulnerability, in this case, refers not so much to the fragility of the human body per se, but to the insignificant place of humanity within the larger order of nature. In this respect, it is intriguing that FitzGerald's *Red Sea* is so reminiscent of the work of Barnett Newman (fig. 7), whose abstract canvases and large areas of unmodulated color are also divided by thin vertical lines, and whose interpretive concerns also revolved around evoking humanity's sense of helplessness before the void.[28]

By abstract means, then, both FitzGerald and Newman are trying to convey specific meanings about our place in the greater order of the cosmos, i.e. meanings that differ from those originating in arbitrary signs such as language, as well as from those that attempt to evoke the physical or cultural associations we attach directly to the human body. But the intentions motivating FitzGerald's work may be essentially no different from the ones motivating Eilís O'Connell, Maher, or Prendergast: namely, that sensations originating from our physical experiences can be projected onto a variety of shapes in order to construct and convey meaning. The only difference between FitzGerald and the artists mentioned above is her decision to embrace an abstract idiom—a difference that helps not only distinguish her production from those of the other artists we have encountered thus far, but a difference that also tends to identify her work as the most idiosyncratic and singular in this exhibition.

With the works of Gwen O'Dowd (nos. 1,2, pl. I, no. 3) and Mary Lohan (no. 4, pl. II, no. 5), the exhibition comes full circle. The theme of landscape re-emerges, yet it is treated with the same technical handling that was evident in the neo-expressionist canvases of Rita Duffy and Eithne Jordan. But although this technique connects O'Dowd and Lohan's work with Duffy and Jordan's expressionism—as well as with the belief in gestural painting's ability to forge a direct, immediate mode of communication—O'Dowd or Lohan's thematic concerns are closer to FitzGerald and to Eilís O'Connell's. The land, moreover, is not



FIG. 8
Jackson Pollock
U.S., 1912-56
The Flame
c. 1934-38
oil on canvas mounted on composition board
The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Enid A. Haupt Fund. Photograph ©1997 The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

depicted as a commodity or resource to be exploited (as in Prendergast), nor is it seen as an isolated but impregnable fortress (as in O'Reilly or Deirdre O'Connell). According to O'Dowd, the references to nature in her paintings are not geographically over-specific; their meanings derive from the way chasms and dark spaces contrast with their surrounding rock formations—not by overly nationalistic associations, or by correlations between the land and the female body.

As in the work of FitzGerald, connections can also be drawn between O'Dowd and Lohan's work and the international manifestations of abstract expressionism in America and Europe after the Second World War. Even seemingly abstract paintings were often related to landscape imagery, however tenuous the interpretive or visual connections were drawn. In some instances, however, the connections were not tenuous at all. In the work of Jackson Pollock, e.g. *The Flame* (fig. 8) or *The Deep*, the artist also attempted to suggest, either through titles or through visual clues, the often destructive and uncontrollable aspects of the natural dimension. Similarly, both O'Dowd and Lohan's paintings are often devoid of a human presence; as a result, spectators have few visual clues or frames of reference against which to gauge the scale of the landscape depicted.

In O'Dowd's *Uaimh* (cave) *Series* (nos. 1, 2, pl. I, no. 3), a dark form at the center of as work could represent either a slight indentation or a massive chasm. The artist provides a certain amount of information for us to recognize these forms as geological formations, but withholds the information necessary to interpret scale. The same could be said of many abstract expressionist suggestions of landscape (e.g. the works of Pollock mentioned above, or even the canvases of Clyfford Still). O'Dowd, herself, freely admits to having been trained in the tradition of abstract expressionism, and although her technique is consistent with twentieth-century precedents, her evocation of the tradition of sublime landscape painting is also connected to nineteenth-century European prototypes, specifically the works of Caspar Wolf, J.W.M. Turner, James Ward, or John Robert Cozens.[29]

For O'Dowd, the landscape, then, is not necessarily physically or psychologically reassuring, or a national symbol, or a commodity to be ruthlessly exploited and controlled, or an analog for the form or fertility of the female body. It becomes, rather, a locus of ambiguity. Unspecified in terms of geography or scale, it suggests the permanence of nature, a permanence against which the impermanence of human culture can be opposed. This same contrast, of course, is also at the heart of Maher or FitzGerald's work; O'Dowd's contrasts, however, are not as blatant—they are more implicit rather than explicit, subtle rather than conspicuous.

For Lohan, the rhythm and energy of the landscape becomes a means of transliterating the energy released during an excessively physical act of painting. The materiality of the paint, moreover, applied thickly, layer after layer, becomes an analog for the physicality and tangibility of matter. Like O'Dowd's landscapes, Lohan's works in this exhibition are predominantly dark, a color scheme that, coupled with the absence of human references, and its concomitant ambiguity of scale, suggest nature's inhospitableness, or its ultimate resistance to control (no. 4, pl. II, no. 5). But although the theme of nature distinguishes Lohan's work from Jordan's emphasis on the human face, or from Duffy's human narratives, Lohan's suggestion of the physicality of nature through her own working process—i.e. her own physicality—reinvokes the personal connotations with which neo-expressionism is usually invested. In other words, Lohan's work is just as much about herself as it is about nature, a co-identity that strikes remarkable parallels between

her work and that of contemporary neo-expressionist painters (as well as with American abstract expressionist artists of the '40s and '50s).

In reviewing the diversity of images included in this exhibition, it is clear that the application of categories, "contemporary," "Irish," "women," or "artists," in no way enforces a single, totalizing reading of this body of material. As suggested at the outset, these categories intersect a wide range of other, equally forceful categories. Yet against a variety of interpretive frames of reference (those provided in this essay as well as those provided by other essays in this catalogue), the complexity of this body of work can emerge in sharper relief. Not only will rarely shown visual material be exhibited in the United States, but further connections (as well as dissimilarities) can be drawn between the artists themselves, between these artists and other manifestations in contemporary art, as well as between their work and the aesthetic, historical, political, and cultural contexts out of which these works emerged.

What these connections reveal, more than anything else, is a kind of visual and ideological pluralism in practice. Whether artists chose to focus on the human form, landscape, architecture, mass-produced utilitarian objects, or even if they use the female body itself, the specific interpretive ramifications emerging from these choices can only be discerned on a case-by-case basis. Even if the majority of these artists endorse a feminist perspective, and even if this perspective functions as a broad theoretical framework against which their pieces can be construed, the meanings they attach to each of the thematic concerns outlined above cannot be predicted at the outset. To be sure, each artist in this exhibition falls comfortably within the label of "contemporary Irish women artists," but, that label notwithstanding, this body of material—in the end—reveals exceptional visual, conceptual, as well as ideological diversity, a diversity unrestricted and unhampered by the label or categorical framework this exhibition provides.

Notes

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1 For a powerful example of a feminist intervention in the history of art, and for an argument for the general overhaul of conventional art historical strategies in scholarship, see Pollock 1988.

2 For a comprehensive account of the role of categorization in mental life from a cognitive model, see Lakoff 1987.

3 For a general survey of different international manifestations of neo-expressionism and gestural painting in an international context, see Godfrey 1986.

4 See Fowler 1990, pp. 52-67.

5 For a good summary of the ideological and interpretive assumptions behind the modernist paradigm, see Greenberg 1965.

6 See Barber 1995, p. 12.

7 For further information on the ideological and political debate surrounding the return to figuration in the '80s, see Buchloh 1981 and Kuspit 1983.

8 See Godfrey 1986, pp. 32, 33, 36.

9 For a survey of Kiefer's work, and paraphrases of conversations with the artist, see Rosenthal 1987.

10 For further discussion of O'Reilly's use of these images, see the essay by Robert Savage in this catalogue.

11 O'Reilly 1997a.

12 See Ratcliff 1983.

13 For more on Duchamp, see Sanouillet and Peterson 1989 and D'Harnoncourt 1973.

14 See Varnedoe and Gopnik 1990.

15 See Ross and Harten 1988 and Gudis 1989.

16 See Searle 1979, p. 59.

17 For more on these issues, see Lunn 1982.

18 See Foster 1985, pp. 58-77.

19 For an outline of the basic philosophical and aesthetic strategies behind Happenings, see Kaprow 1966.

20 For a good summary of these and other issues, see Gouma-Peterson and Mathews 1987, pp. 326-57.

21 See Sayre 1989, p. 90.

22 See Beardsley 1984.

23 See Lippard 1983.

24 O'Connell 1997b.

25 See Tisdall 1979, pp. 101-05.

26 For a good summary of the issues raised by post-minimalism, see Morris 1970.

27 This event has been recorded as part of the Beuys "myth," although some critics have called the veracity of Beuys' account in question.

28 See Newman 1947.

29 See Rosenblum 1975.

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ADELE DALSIMER AND VERA KREILKAMP

Re/Dressing Mother Ireland: Feminist Imagery in Art and Literature

Contemporary Irish women artists inherit a burden of historical imperatives. In Ireland—more insistently than in other countries—national identity is gendered, rooted in an ancient native iconography. Unlike her European or American counterpart, the Irish artist responds not only to the central themes of an international feminist discourse but also to a tradition of representing national sovereignty as female. Thus in poetry, fiction, painting, and sculpture, women artists confront and redress Ireland's gendered iconography, often through a reclamation of a lost tradition of strong women or through witty parody of patriarchal idealizations.

In the pre-Christian Celtic world, the female goddess—depicted as warrior, mother, beautiful woman or aged crone—represented the land and the King's spiritual and legal dominion over it. No king could legitimately assume power without a symbolic marriage to this female deity. Early characterizations of these earth goddesses in Celtic literature depict strikingly aggressive, powerful, and sexual women: figures like the voracious warrior Queen Medb who dominates her multiple lovers; or the Morrígan, a female goddess of both fertility and death who haunts the battlefield. Such representations of women appear as well in the sheela-na-gigs found on medieval Irish churches and castles—grotesque female figures whose postures direct attention to their exaggerated genitalia.[1] These stone carvings reflect, perhaps, the syncretism of a displaced pagan culture's belief in powerful goddesses of creation and destruction with a newer Christian disapproval of female sexuality.

Powerful visual and oral depictions of women survived until the Elizabethan plantations. But by the late seventeenth century, with the final defeat of Jacobite hopes at the Battle of the Boyne and the eighteenth-century imposition of the Penal Laws on Catholic Ireland, a new female image emerged to represent the defeated and colonized land. The traditional allegorizing of Ireland assumed another form as land and female body fused in the imagery of imperial and nationalist contestation. Instead of a powerful warrior queen, nationalist sentiment envisioned an icon of defeat, surrender, and helplessness. New representations— Hibernia, Erin, the Poor Old Woman, Cathleen Ní Houlihan, the Dark Rosaleen—displaced Mebd and the Morrígan. In the *aisling*, a new Gaelic form of vision poetry, a defeated people without political status or legal rights exploited the figure of a beautiful young girl or poor old woman in need of protection and rescue by a foreign prince from across the sea.

Whereas Celtic mythology had offered strong female figures—often sexual and independent—Irish nationalism and Catholicism erased most of these qualities. The growing nationalism of nineteenth-century Ireland appropriated feminine icons to encode republican sentiment, often to escape imperial censorship. An allegorized female appeared not only as a representation of defeat and suffering, but also as an exhortation for change. The traumatic devastation of the mid-nineteenth century Famine and the subsequent triumphalism of the Catholic Church increasingly imposed the image of Mary, the sorrowful Mother mourning her dead son, as the model for Irish womanhood. Thus the suffering Mother Ireland who demanded the blood sacrifice of her sons merged with the Catholic *Mater Dolorosa*. Such imagery dominated nationalist rhetoric, most memorably in W.B. Yeats' play *Cathleen Ní Houlihan* and in the poems and

speeches of Padraig Pearse, leader of the 1916 Easter Rebellion. As motherhood became the consolidating metaphor of the nation, the family, rather than the individual, became the central social unit.

Expressed in both visual art and literature by the image of the rural cottage, the ideal of family and home was enshrined in the 1937 Constitution. In his 1943 St. Patrick's Day speech, President Eamon De Valera reiterated this vision by extolling a domestic Eden:

That Ireland which we dreamed of would be the home of a people who valued material wealth only as a basis of right living, of a people who were satisfied with frugal comfort and devoted their leisure to the things of the spirit; a land whose countryside would be bright with cosy homesteads, whose fields and villages would be joyous with sounds of industry, the romping of sturdy children, the contests of athletic youth, the laughter of comely maidens; whose firesides would be the forum of the wisdom of serene old age.[2]

De Valera's privileging of women's roles as wives and mothers accorded with church teaching that banned contraception, divorce, and abortion. Legislation barring married women from state employment, for example, underscored the new government's overt regulations on women and created a nation that virtually excluded them from power structures. Pressure for change erupted in 1983, with the bitter controversy surrounding the abortion referendum written to protect the rights of the unborn child. Such pressure reasserted itself again in 1986 with the referendum for Constitutional changes on divorce. Although, in both cases, conservative forces prevailed, a growing feminist voice in national political life was heard. Contemporary writers and visual artists continue to challenge the traditional constructions of gender that are slowly being eroded in the political realm. In the face of nineteenth and early-twentieth-century idealizations of domesticity, their works subvert and reinterpret the iconography of the past. Their rejoinders to tradition, often defiant and parodic, enter the international feminist exploration of social roles, but respond always to the local and national.

NO. 46A (P. 36)
Pauline Cummins and Louise Walsh
Sounding the Depths (detail)
installation: video projection, light boxes and sound
Courtesy of the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin

Not surprisingly, in recent creative work male and female Irish artists offer different images of gender roles. In Neil Jordan's prize-winning film, *The Crying Game*, for example, a patriarchal nation's anxieties about female power manifest themselves in Jude, the gun wielding I.R.A. agent, punished with a bloody death for her sexuality and aggression. Thus, despite Jordan's groundbreaking reinterpretation of traditional political, racial, sexual stereotypes in the film, he attacks precisely that regendering that characterizes much feminist art. In her short story, *Naming the Names*, however, Anne Devlin sympathetically depicts a female I.R.A. agent who appropriates a traditional male political role. The name of Devlin's protagonist—Finn—identifies her with a heroic male warrior of Celtic tradition. Through her sexuality, Finn deliberately lures her lover, a Protestant judge's son, to his death; when imprisoned, she, like the ancient warriors pledged to clan loyalty, refuses to betray her associates, to "name the names." In this haunting story, as in her more widely known play *Ourselves Alone*, Devlin explores, with sympathy and complexity, women's involvement in violent politics.

In *Re/Dressing Cathleen*, the exhibition presented at the McMullen Museum of Art, a similar appropriation of traditional male imagery and subject matter appears in the work of Geraldine O'Reilly (nos. 8-12, pl. IV, nos. 13, 14) and Deirdre O'Connell (nos. 6, 7, pl. III). Their works evoke an aggressive masculinity, and subvert nineteenth-century domestic ideologies. In *Strongholds* (no. 8) from her *Land Marks Series*, O'Reilly etches the fortified military architecture of the northern border counties as a means of exploring her own identity as an Irish woman: "identity for me is bound up with the land and the territory." In claiming as subject matter these Norman castles, towers, fortresses, and keeps—the physical evidence of centuries of colonial warfare and occupation—O'Reilly reinscribes for women's art the aggressive imagery of forcible occupation and defense. Seeking to evoke both mental and physical imprisonment, she multiplies familiar landmarks and calls the castles "strongholds" to suggest their original functions. "I'm not interested in 'the Troubles' as a subject for my work but I'm fascinated by how people in the border areas deal with the effects of the Troubles—in order to go about their daily business they have to maneuver through a whole series of complex signs, signals and symbols."[3] While retaining a traditional female interest in the "daily business" of life—obsessively marking the signs and signals that accompany the most ordinary

excursions into the northern countryside—O'Reilly, nevertheless, masters oppressive male imagery and makes it her own.

Deirdre O'Connell's *Point of Observation* (no. 6), while more indeterminate in its subject matter, also plays with traditional masculine forms. The piece illustrates O'Connell's interest in using "very simple constructions which have resonances of other, different images and concepts, and the common factor is the architectural form as a symbol or as a conveyor of the ideological."[4] Part of her *Hinterland* exhibition, a series of works created in the industrial wasteland of Greenpoint, Brooklyn, *Point of Observation* evokes the petrochemical skyline of that decaying urban setting, and through its title, an observatory for watching the stars. But more immediately and aggressively, the image asserts itself as a rusted erect penile form on a mound of stones, curiously reminiscent of the Mussenden Temple, an Anglo-Irish folly on a rock cliff in Derry, built for viewing the coastline. Recalling a primitive stone mound, an eighteenth-century imperial observation point, and a contemporary wasteland, the installation piece exists as a witty depiction of decaying masculine power.

Other artists in this exhibition parody nationalist and Catholic ideologies that freeze women into programmed identities: Alice Maher's *Thorn House* (no. 33), as well as Rita Duffy's *Scullery* (no. 20, pl. VII) and *Becoming* (no. 18), explode idealizations of Irish domesticity. Maher's impregnable and forbidding miniature house, covered with rose thorns, like Duffy's hellish vision of a washing-up area, reifies the darker sides of domestic spaces. *Thorn House* draws ironically on the rose as traditional symbol of Ireland and also evokes the conservative iconography of the rural cottage in the west, long a staple of tourist board marketing campaigns. The cottage "as surrogate for the depiction of the rural Irish woman and the values of motherhood, tradition and stability,"[5] extols precisely those Irish women who, according to recent demographic data, remain the most underemployed, neglected, and silenced social group in the nation.[6]

Rita Duffy's work also undermines the domestic ideal. In a recent catalogue of her *Palimpsest* paintings, Tess Hurson's poem *The White Hens of Stranmillis*, comments directly on the paintings, as in the following stanza on Duffy's *Scullery*.

Between the kitchen scissors
Some baby is conveniently suspended
Above a raging washing machine.
I would save them all
Blanch the arterial spurt
Were it not for
Crosses carried speechless
Beyond the house...[7]

In Duffy's expressionistic painting of a scullery, clothes, ladles, and a baby (affixed to forceps-tongs) hang above a flaming washer and allude to the nightmare of domesticity that controls Eavan Boland's *Tirade of the Mimic Muse*. In that poem, another Irish artist exposes the violent reality of women's lives, berating the "sluttish" falsity of domestic ideals, and vowing to replace idealizations with "true reflections." Like Duffy's painting, the poem reveals the underbelly of the kitchen and nursery by raising the specters of child abuse, wife beating, female suffering:

The kitchen screw and the rack of labour,
The wash thumbed and the dish cracked,
The scream of beaten women,
The crime of babies battered,
The hubbub and the shriek of daily grief
That seeks asylum behind suburb walls—[8]

In *Becoming*, Duffy parodies the sacred mother figure of nineteenth-century Ireland. In this surreal domestic image, the exaggerated weariness of the mother's face prohibits any idealization of motherhood. From her mouth tumble shamrocks, Ireland's most clichéd symbol, on to her child and the altar/kitchen table. This version of Mother Ireland appears to drain her boiled dead child in a chalice/colander. In thesavage domestic christening rite of *Becoming*, a burdened contemporary housewife, murderous goddess and Mother Church merge in a dark narrative of Irish Catholic maternity.

Like visual artists, contemporary Irish poets evoke subversive visions of traditional female icons. In Paula Meehan's *The Statue of the Virgin Mary at Granard Speaks*, the Virgin, the intercessor between sinful humans and the divine, responds without pity to the isolated death of fifteen-year-old Ann Lovett, who died after secretly giving birth at one of Ireland's many shrines to Mary. Lovett's death occurred a few months after the passage of the 1983 abortion referendum, which gave the unborn child rights equal to that of the mother. In Meehan's poem, Mary, disgruntled at

being "stuck up here in this grotto," longs for a fuller life: "My being cries out to be incarnate, incarnate, /maculate and tousled in a honeyed bed."[9] In her self-preoccupation, this detached icon of female perfection fails utterly to respond to the cries of the dying girl in her extremis:

I did not move
I didn't lift a finger to help her
I didn't intercede with heaven,
Nor whisper the charmed word in God's ear.[10]

Even more parodically, Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill attacks the *Shan Van Vocht*, or Poor Old Woman, as a "cranky, cantankerous" old slut, whose decaying and cancerous body slobbers and whines from its wheelchair. This Mother Ireland, "whose eyes were radiant once with youth and blue fire,"[11] is memorialized as the murderer of young men. In Yeats' *Cathleen Ní Houlihan*, the dominant literary text of romantic nationalism, the Poor Old Woman is transformed into beautiful young queen by the sacrificial deaths of young men. But in Ní Dhomhnaill's parody, the murderous Cathleen is rewarded with decay and ridicule while her victims are "doomed to be burned-out, dazzled and frazzled" not by "ordinary love/ But with a gnawing, migraine-bright black lust/ And galloping consumption."[12]

Other images in this exhibition problematize the body of Mother Ireland—creating sculptural female forms in which aggression occludes maternity. The dark resonances of Alice Maher's *Bee Dress* (no. 34, pl. XI), a surreal invocation of a hostile female psycho-sexuality, recall the death-dealing Morrígan or warrior Queen Medb of Celtic tradition, rather than the nineteenth-century's Virgin/cottage idealizations. *Bee Dress* turns the honey-generating bee hive inside out as the normally hidden swarm of bees blankets the woman's body. Instead of evoking associations of sweetness and fertility—as in the idealized "hive for the honey bee" of W.B. Yeats' *The Lake Isle of Innisfree*—Maher clothes the female form in a formidable armored bee shield. She transforms the carcasses of the fertile male drone bees, who perish when they impregnate the queen bee, into the macabre, luxuriant dress of a warrior queen.

Mary FitzGerald's *Heart* (no. 38), a work in glass rendered on the black velvet ground of a dress/shroud, reinscribes the seat of human affections and love into a sculpture implying pain and assault. The work evokes the iconography of the Sacred Heart, an image found universally in Irish Catholic houses, schools, and churches, derived from the visions of Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque, who reputedly carved the word "Jesus" on her breast with a penknife. In *Heart*, outlining the tricorn with fishhook, scalpel, and acupuncture needle—pointed metal instruments of aggression and aggressive healing—FitzGerald reconstructs the suffering female body idealized in Catholic doctrine.

Of all the works in this exhibition, Pauline Cummins and Louise Walsh's *Sounding the Depths* (no. 46, pl. XVI), is most explicit in its response to the beleaguered status of Irish women and most defiant in its reconstruction of the female body. Cummins and Walsh's collaborative installation presents the woman's body in three spaces: a small anteroom of prim and compressed mouths; a larger space with a video tape of shells and sea bed soundings, leading to a shouting, laughing mouth; and a dark space with colored photographs of open mouths projected on to women's bellies or chests. This work recalls both the grotesque imagery of the sexually voracious sheela-na-gigs and the ancient Celtic legend of Deirdre, the loveliest woman in all Ireland who, as an unborn child, cried out from her mother's womb and announced the coming sorrows of Ulster.

The aggression involved in *Sounding the Depths* plays on male castration fears. By projecting a toothed mouth on a female belly, Cummins and Walsh invoke and parody the *vagina dentata*, the most frightening male fantasy of female sexuality. Through visual allusions to the male dread of being swallowed up into a hostile toothed womb, of losing the penis inside the feared vagina, they construct their defiant, explicit renditions of talking wombs. They reveal the "open, vulnerable mouth/hole in our belly" through which women will not only be able to speak "but to shout, to roar with laughter, grief and joy, and finally, to be whole, healed and open."[13]

Sounding the Depths refuses the silencing of women—embracing instead a defiant imagery that conveys the rage and sexuality of women's voices. In a letter about this work, Walsh and Cummins themselves refuse silence: "We won't shut up. We'll not be silenced. We'll find the strength to open up." They announce that their art is committed to "letting the energy flow, loosening the tongue, baring the teeth, stretching the lips, making sounds, beginning to talk. The mouth becomes wide and starts things a moving, giving a voice to the body, locating the

wound, tight and sealed though it is—closing up all that needs to be said."[14] In this aggressive installation, the woman's headless torso—the conveniently mute focus of the male gaze—remains silent no more.

Contemporary Irish women artists, working in the visual arts as well as in literature, collectively reimagine Cathleen. In some cases they literally reclothe her in a new dress—in the armor of Maher's *Bee Dress* or in the black shroud-like drapery of FitzGerald's *Heart*. By conceptually redressing the iconography of Irish womanhood, established in a colony and sustained in a new nation, artists give voice to Cathleen, making her body speak in powerful ways. The visual imagery of *Re/Dressing Cathleen* echoes and supports Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill's abrasive silencing of all traditional idealizations of the Shan Van Vocht, Cathleen, and Dark Rosaleen:

Folly, I'm saying, gets worse with every generation:
Anything, every old cliché in the book, anything at all
To get this old bitch to shut the fuck up.[15]

Notes

1 For further discussion of the sheela-na-gig, see essays by Pamela Berger and Katherine Nahum in this catalogue.

2 De Valera 1980, p. 456.

3 Qtd. in Mohagan 1994, n.p. See the essay by Robert Savage in this catalogue for a summary of "the Troubles."

4 Arts Council Gallery 1990, n.p.

5 Nash 1993, p. 47.

6 Byrne 1993, pp. 159-60.

7 Hurson 1995, p. 7.

8 Boland 1980, pp. 10-11.

9 Meehan 1991, p. 41.

10 Meehan 1991, p. 42.

11 Ní Dhomhnaill 1990, p. 129.

12 Ibid.

13 Qtd. in Roth 1992, p. 6.

14 Ibid.

15 Ní Dhomhnaill 1990, p. 131.

Abbreviations

Boland 1980
Boland, Eavan. *In Her Own Image*. Dublin, 1980.

Byrne 1993
Byrne, Anne. "Revealing Figures? Official Statistics and Rural Irish Women," *Irish Women's Studies Reader*. Ed. Ailbhe Smyth. Dublin, 1993, pp. 140-61.

De Valera 1980
De Valera, Eamon. *Speeches and Statements*. Ed. Maurice Moynihan. Dublin, 1980.

Devlin 1986
Devlin, Anne. *The Way-Paver*. London, 1986.

Hurson 1995
Hurson, Tess. "The White Hens of Stransmillis," in The Orchard Gallery 1995, pp. 5-7.

Meehan 1991
Meehan, Paula. *The Man Who Was Marked by Winter*. Loughcrew, 1991.

Crilly 1989
Mother Ireland. Dir. Anne Crilly. Derry Film and Video, 1989.

IMMA 1992
Sounding the Depths: A Collaborative Installation By Pauline Cummins and Louise Walsh. Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, 1992.

Nash 1993
Nash, Catherine. "Remapping and Renaming: New Cartographies of Identity, Gender and Landscape in Ireland," *Feminist Review* 44 (Summer 1993), pp. 37-57.

Ní Dhomhnaill 1990
Ní Dhomhnaill, Nuala. *Pharaoh's Daughter*. Oldcastle, 1990.

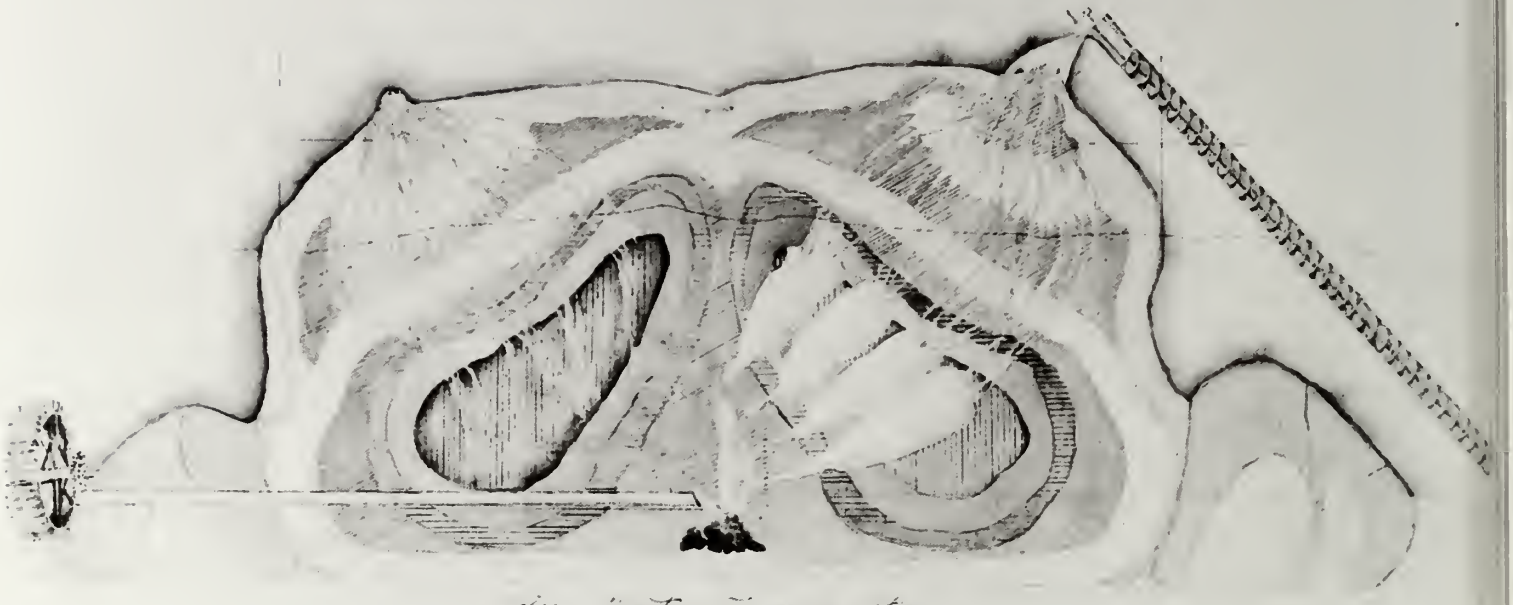
Arts Council Gallery 1990
Deirdre O'Connell, Insula Peninsula. Art Council Gallery Belfast, 1990.

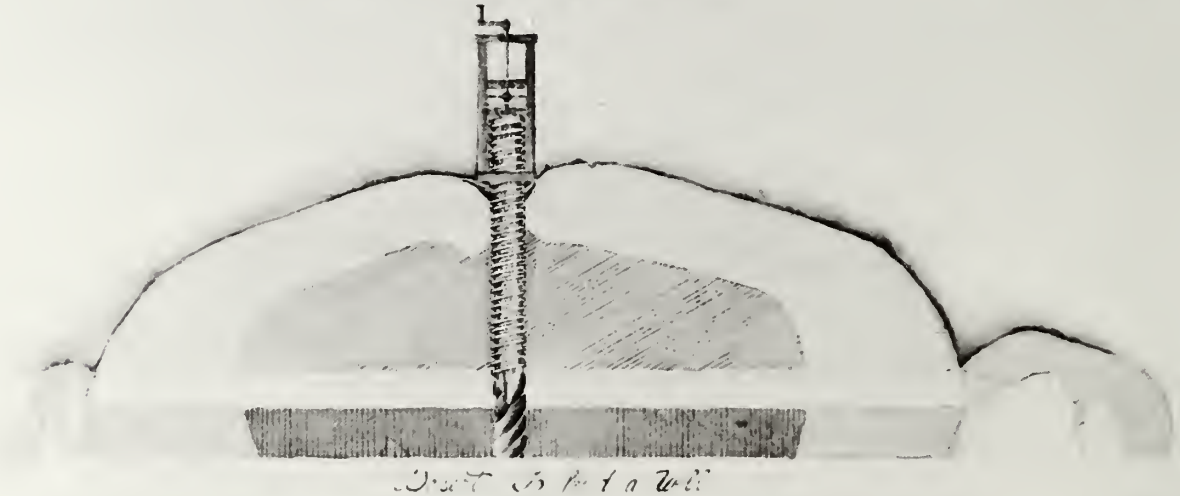
The Orchard Gallery 1995
Rita Duffy, Palimpsest, The Orchard Gallery. Derry, 1995.

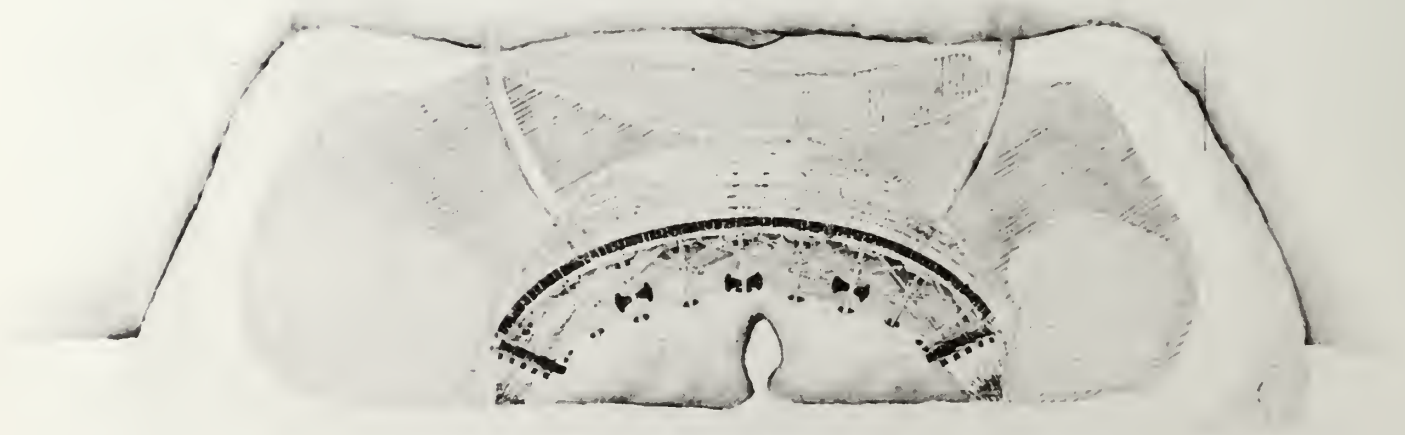
Monagan 1994
Land Marks: Exhibition of Prints By Geraldine O'Reilly. Monaghan, 1994.

Roth 1992
Roth, Moira. "Two Women: The Collaboration of Pauline Cummins and Louise Walsh, or International Conversations Among Women," in IMMA 1992, pp. 5-18.

TO ALTER A LANDSCAPE







JAMES M. SMITH

Retelling Stories: Exposing Mother Ireland in Kathy Prendergast's *Body Map Series* and Mary Leland's *The Killeen*

"Cillín: a church yard set apart for infants; cillíneach: a place set aside for the burial of unbaptised children" [1]

Ireland in the 1990s is undergoing a distinct shift in its expression of cultural issues. Traditionally a society marked by its silence when confronted with controversial social problems, "speaking out" is today increasingly part of visible public discourse. A demand for greater accessibility and accountability is simultaneously forging a new alliance between the spoken and the written word. Nowhere is this alliance more evident than in the increased media coverage afforded the casualties of Irish society in recent years.[2] Examples include the case of Lavinia Kerwick, who was the first Irish rape victim to appear on national television. Her recently published story details her rape, the trial, the suspended sentence conferred on her attacker, and her subsequent battle with anorexia.[3] Alison Cooper, the young woman at the center of the Kilkenny Incest case, also appeared on national television, and, in the process, affixed a human face to the government's officially commissioned report.[4] The TV drama *Family*, written by novelist Roddy Doyle, forced domestic abuse onto the nation's conscience and eventually onto the legislative agenda of Dáil Éireann.[5] Finally, Louis Lentin's TV documentary *Dear Daughter* compelled a nation to acknowledge the physical and psychological abuse meted out to children in Irish orphanages in 1950s and '60s Ireland.[6] These traumatic stories were retold again and again across a variety of media, and subsequently became culturally significant events in mainstream Ireland.[7] The cultural significance of these events increased because, in addition to verbally recognizing a history Irish society prefers not to acknowledge, they also undermined the organizational closed ranks and silence that traditionally accompanies such sensitive issues as rape, incest, domestic abuse, and illegitimacy.

If Ireland's "Official" national narrative resists (that is, denies, silences, and conveniently edits-out) the reality of contemporary social issues, then these stories function as "narrative retellings" and, therefore, as alternative versions to the nation's official story.[8] As such, they deconstruct the version of society offered by Irish politics and religion. Only by admitting into visibility such "narrative retellings" can Ireland inscribe an alternative national narrative, one which accommodates the plurality of Ireland's stories and the inter-dependency among such stories. Only by listening to such "narrative retellings" can Irish society provide accountability for, and facilitate recovery from, the injustices of the past.

Prior to 1990, the more visible exposure afforded recent "narrative retellings" was almost unthinkable.[9] Silence and the "whole spectrum of denial" enabled the nation-state to ride out various controversies such as the Kerry Babies tribunal, the Ann Lovett inquiry, and the Eileen Flynn affair.[10] In addition to these three individual tragedies, political events such as the Abortion (1983) and Divorce (1986) referenda made Ireland in the '80s a particularly hostile social environment for women. This essay examines two narratives that emanate from and respond to this vexed decade for Irish women: Kathy Prendergast's *Body Map Series* (nos. 21-28, pl. VIII, nos. 29-30, pl. IX, no. 31) and Mary Leland's novel *The Killeen*.[11] Both works represent early manifestations of the alternative national narrative outlined above.

Kathy Prendergast, whose work reflects an ironic and critical response to such an environment, insists that there is "no feminist element" to her body map drawings (1983).[12] Instead, Prendergast claims that her work represents a desire to map "a personal geography."[13] However, the need to map "a personal geography" in itself suggests a personal response to the manner in which Ireland in the '80s politically mapped, altered, and controlled women in society.[14] Mary Leland's novel, *The Killeen* (1985), also responds to the contested and delineated positions of Irish women during this same decade. This novel's depiction of a community's containment of illegitimacy, child abuse and infanticide annotates in significant ways its contemporary context. Consequently, Prendergast's *Body Map Series* and Leland's *The Killeen* can be read as notable "narrative retellings." This essay argues that the work of artist and novelist self-consciously subverts and re-inscribes the traditional gendering of Irish nationalism in feminine terms, and, in particular, the image of Mother Ireland as nurturer. Moreover, both works make evident the legislative infrastructure fundamental to this gendering of Irish nationalism, and thereby render visible the nation's architecture of containment as it responds to and neutralizes threatened ruptures to the national iconography.[15]

The fusion of Irish nationalism and the feminine is generally understood as a by-product of post-independent Ireland's need to re-invent itself, and, in the process, assume the traditionally male role of political power long denied under colonialism.[16] As a result, real-life Irish women were re-positioned so as to signify men's authority and, accordingly, were "inevitably simplified" as passive projections of a national ideal.[17] This national ideal was reinforced by the 1922 and 1937 Constitutions, the latter of which redefined women as "mothers" and insisted on the support given to the state by their "duties in the home."[18] The ideal was further buttressed by discriminatory legislation addressing illegitimacy, divorce, contraception, and eventually the ban on married women working in the civil service.[19] Later social welfare legislation on infanticide (1949), adoption (1952) and industrial and reformatory schools (1949, 1957) was equally significant, especially with respect to the nation's architecture of containment. Legislation, therefore, served to obfuscate the fact that women were to serve, not only as the passive emblems of the nation, but also as the territory over which patriarchal power was exercised.[20] Post-independent Irish politics literally engineered the necessary legislative infrastructure as supporting scaffold for the fusion of the national and the feminine secured in the symbol of Mother Ireland.

Kathy Prendergast's *Body Map Series* makes explicit this fusion in the symbol of Mother Ireland. In *Enclosed Worlds in Open Spaces* (no. 22), Prendergast adopts the role of cartographer in order to depict a truncated, and consequently faceless and voiceless, woman's body as a map of a political territory. The territory is partly surrounded by a sea complete with compass points and ships, mapped onto a grid of longitudinal and latitudinal lines. The areas and features of the body make up the terrain: breasts are labeled as volcanic mountains, the abdomen as desert, the navel as crater, and the vulva as harbor. Moreover, Prendergast's map suggests a blueprint for the processes of exploring, altering, exploiting and controlling the political territory. But such a blueprint, by necessity, must foreground a concurrent procedure, namely, the fact that it is a woman's body that is being explored, altered, exploited and controlled. Consequently, the artist's depiction of the woman's body as a mapped political space not only highlights the paradox implicit in this drawing's title, it simultaneously exposes the anomaly implicit in the symbol of Mother Ireland which equates political control of the nation with patriarchal control of the woman's body.

Accompanying this map of the body is *To Alter a Landscape* (no. 26), revealing cross-sections of the volcanic mountains/breasts, the desert/abdomen and a flat plain above the pubic area marked as a mountain range. These cross-sections depict how the body/land can be altered, harnessed and mined for its resources: the fires in the volcanic mountains/breasts may be extinguished, water can be found in the desert/navel, a passage can be mined to the harbor/vulva through the cavern/womb. Both *To Control a Landscape— Irrigation* (no. 28, pl. VIII) and *To Control a Landscape —Oasis* (no. 29) suggest the ultimate end of such a project. The symmetrical machines extract

NO. 26 (P. 42)
Kathy Prendergast
Body Map Series
To Alter a Landscape
1983
watercolor and ink on paper
30 x 22 in.
Courtesy of the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin
Vincent and Noeleen Ferguson Donation

energy from the depth of the altered land/body and irrigate the surface, thus making it fertile. The text inscribed on the latter drawing details the operation:

The fires being quenched, water is pumped into the core of the mountains and stored in tanks. The connecting tubes are attached to the tanks and as the mills turn water is pumped to the surface through volcanic ducts. Thus instead of emitting fire and smoke, the mountains will now exude water and irrigate the soil.[21]

The threat posed by this naturally volcanic body demands neutralization: the drawings suggest, therefore, how the igneous, gaseous and aqueous fluids can be siphoned off into pipes, ducts, drains, etc. In this way, the *Body Map Series* underscores the subservient relationship between the subterranean nature of the territory's resources and their harnessing so as to make possible a productive/fertile surface. This same relationship is manifest in the manipulation and control of the woman's body in the service of a national iconography. The drawings also reveal a territory altered and controlled by mechanical pumps and wells, shafts, tunnels, caverns, sprinklers, tanks, drains, ducts, mills, etc., but those who erect and presumably operate this mechanized infrastructure are curiously absent. The "civil" engineers who manipulate this territory and reduce it to its reproductive function depend on mechanical apparatus in order to render their anatomical dissection invisible. In the same way, post-independent Irish politics engineered a legislative machinery to maintain the efficacy of a national iconography and, ultimately, this iconography proved contingent on women being reduced to their reproductive function as mothers. Both sets of machinery, the mechanical and the legislative, conveniently obscure their inherent political design.

In her essay, "Remapping the Body/Land: New Cartographies of Identity, Gender, and Landscape in Ireland," Catherine Nash examines Kathy Prendergast's body map drawings to elicit the renegotiation of nationalist iconography in the post-colonial moment.[22] According to Nash, political and overtly female iconography was reconfigured to deny "women an autonomous sexuality," as the patriarchal partners of cultural nationalism, church and state, preferred images of the "old peasant women who could represent the successful outcome of a life lived in accordance with the demands of motherhood."[23] Ultimately, Nash suggests that:

The cottage in the landscape came to carry the cultural weight of the idealization of traditional rural family life and its fixed morality and gender roles. It became a surrogate for the depiction of Irish rural women and the values of motherhood, tradition, and stability. The cottage as "cradle of the race" evoked the idea of women as preservers of the race, active only as nurturers and reproducers of the masculine Gael.[24]

Like Prendergast's drawings, Mary Leland's novel, *The Killeen*, provides a critical response to such iconographic renegotiation and reconfiguration. The novel, like the art works, functions as a "narrative retelling" of its contemporary context and exists in a state of dependency with other "narrative retellings" such as the Kerry Babies tribunal, Ann Lovett, Eileen Flynn or the various moving statues phenomena of the mid-decade.[25] Moreover, *The Killeen* furnishes a counterstrategic re-inscription of "the cottage," "the old peasant woman," and ultimately of Ireland's architecture of containment as they safeguard the emblematic significance of symbolic Mother Ireland.

The plot of Leland's novel focuses on Margaret Coakley who is driven from the family cottage in rural Adrigole by her mother to work as a scullery maid in a Cork convent. After Margaret becomes pregnant, she is quickly and quietly moved to the house of Julia Mulcahy, the aristocratic young widow of a martyred republican who starved to death on hunger strike in a Dublin prison. The novel turns on both women's decision to escape Ireland; Julia in an attempt to save her young son, Pat, from his two maiden aunts' scheme that he follow in his father's footsteps and die for Ireland, Margaret in an attempt to start a new life free from the stigma and shame of being an unmarried mother. However, it is the fate of Thomas, Margaret's illegitimate son, who gives this novel its emotional force. Unlike Pat, his legitimate counterpart, Thomas is left behind by his mother. Rescued from the orphanage and returned to Adrigole, Margaret entrusts Thomas to Michael, her older brother, before she travels to England with her new husband. Ultimately, Thomas' fate also explains why Michael resolves to turn his back on Ireland, as Margaret, Julia and all the enlightened and energetic characters of this novel have done before him. This exodus in itself undermines the symbolism of Mother Ireland as nurturer, but the most telling counterpoint to the over-simplification of such images is left to Mary Coakley, the youngest sibling, at the novel's end.

Mary Coakley, who initially remains in Ireland as sacrificial caregiver to her decrepit elderly mother and then as economic compensation in the "match" that results in her leaving Adrigole for married life in the city, explodes the vacuous nature of woman as emblem of nation. She admits: "'I never knew how old he was, not until the night I married him did I know how old he was', as she looked out over the hills of the city...to Bantry and Adrigole, where the cravings of her own body had been driven underground by the urgent hungers of the land" (160). Mary's glance backward is devoid of sentiment and nostalgia. Married city life is far from satisfying, but it was in Adrigole, the idealized "Hidden Ireland" of west Cork, where "the urgent hungers of the land" refused to nurture the "cravings of her own body."[26] The door of Mary's "narrow house in Cork" opens, in her memory, back onto the door of the family cottage where her bitter and resentful mother soured and stunted her children's lives; lashing them with her tongue, chastising them alternatively with insults and silence, admonishing them not to expand their horizons, driving them away to care for relatives, to work in Cork, and then into exile to England and America (160). But if Mary, Margaret, and Michael are victims of their mother's enervating environment, they also are survivors. Thomas, when left in his grandmother's care, is not so lucky, and it is with this illegitimate child that Leland deconstructs the national iconography of Ireland's traditional thatched cottage, reconstituting it as the site of horrendous child abuse and willed, if not actual, child-murder. Leland's "old peasant woman," preferred emblem of nationalist Ireland, "plants" her illegitimate grandchild on the scorching kitchen range in demented rage, she "marks" and "scars" his two year old body with bruising signs of her pent-up hatred, she all but succeeds in emasculating him with the kitchen shears, and ultimately her curses permeate, torture and drive "all hope from his frame" (149).[27] Leland's re-inscribed "old peasant woman" is reduced to a cowering emaciated figure, intimidated into submission only after Michael's threat to commit her to "the Asylum" and thus bring further scandal to her family name and household (147).

Ireland's iconographic cottage proves incapable of containing the threat posed by Thomas' illegitimacy. When not being abused, Thomas is "kept hidden," "fed hastily," concealed in the "back room" where his cries are muted by a closed door (145). Outside the cottage, Thomas' illegitimacy proves equally menacing to Adrigole's symbolic community. In illness, the village dispensary, representative of official state health care for children, chooses not to see his obvious signs of abuse and dismisses his condition as "influenza" (149).[28] In death, the parish priest, in the absence of a "baptismal certificate," denies Thomas burial in the Catholic graveyard (151). Communal ritual breaks down when the village women choose not to observe the traditional "keen" (151).[29] Finally, Michael's neighbors literally distance themselves as he carries his dead nephew through the village streets. Michael understands these acts of communal containment not only as rejection but also as a form of mutilation:[30]

> Michael felt as though he had been told that he could only continue to live the life he knew, among these people, if he cut both his legs off.... The child who was dead was like a branch of his own body; he had been offered to the community when there was no request to be made, no special treatment needed. And he had been rejected (154).

Such rejection and mutilation are exactly what maintain the foundations of Ireland's "Official" national narrative; the community is reaffirmed precisely because of such public acts of repudiation, and paradoxically, these acts thereby preserve and safeguard the national iconography. Leland's novel, as a result, discloses how Irish society denies, silences and edits-out the plurality of stories that reflect the reality of contemporary social ills.

Leland's re-inscription of nationalist iconography is not simply leveled at rural Adrigole. In fact, the ironic force of this novel stems from the fact that it is Margaret, Thomas' mother, who rescues him from institutionalized care in Cork and returns him to Michael, his grandmother and the family cottage. The alternative urban Ireland, rife with political division and conservative middle-class Catholic morality, proves equally severe on mothers and children, particularly unmarried mothers and illegitimate children. This Ireland intervenes only to contain, and thus conceal, Margaret's "shame" and "degradation" as unmarried mother (33-4). Liberated from the burden of symbolic simplification, Margaret challenges the emblematic significance of the Virgin Mary as exemplary of the asexual motherhood to which post-independent Irish women were expected to aspire. Recalling a childhood replete with processions and week long exhortations of devotion to the "Mother of God," Margaret now remembers the hymns she sang

at the village shrine "with the indulgence of a parent... someone who knows, at last, what is real" (43).

Society, however, has erected an infrastructure by which Margaret's reality can be neatly negated: Father Costello, brother of Margaret's Republican lover Éarnan, and Sister Thomas arrange for Margaret to live with Julia Mulcahy. Thomas, after a hasty baptism, is immediately separated from Margaret and removed to the "special house" operated by the two maiden aunts of Julia's dead husband. In containing, and thus rendering invisible, the threat posed by Margaret and Thomas, Leland's novel makes evident the connection between the symbolism of Mother Ireland and its requisite infrastructure of containment.

As the fictional architects of this infrastructure of containment, the two fanatically nationalist maiden aunts also serve as the urban counterpart of Adrigole's "old peasant woman," and therefore as further re-inscriptions of the preferred emblem of nationalist iconography. Referred to as "a couple of old harpies" (72), these two crones mold the male members of their family into "agents" of their vision for a "nation strong, inviolable, racially untarnished, Catholic from Bantry to Belfast" (55). Both women delight in the minute detail of Maurice's hunger strike, assured that as "relatives of Maurice Mulcahy, hero and martyr" their "political lineage [is]...impeccable for eternity" (52). But it is their perverse strategy to school the next generation of Irish martyrs that underscores Leland's counterstrategic portrait of political sacrifice in the name of Mother Ireland. The two aunts attempt repeatedly to undermine Julia as mother by seeking to ensure that Pat, too, grows up to be a volunteer and martyr like his father. They do not even acknowledge Margaret as Thomas' mother, and thus claim him as part of the extended Mulcahy family. Hence their "special house," an alternative to the state legislated orphanage, at once both conceals Thomas' illegitimacy, thus preserving middle-class Catholic Ireland's demand for respectability, and views him as mere "fodder for the fight" (113). The "special house," consequently, functions as a further corruption of the traditional cottage, for it too operates in the service of a politicized Mother Ireland nurturing a "breeding ground for volunteers, martyrs if need be" (113).

Leland's re-inscriptions of nationalist iconography expose the collusive dependency between symbolic Mother Ireland and the nation's architecture of containment. The results of such collusion are undeniable: Margaret is married in England, Julia and Pat are safe in France, Éarnan is in America. But it is Michael, rejected and mutilated after Thomas' death, who finally severs any easy correlation between symbolic and actual mother, between emblematic landscape and underlying realities. Michael's belated efforts to protect Thomas from his grandmother's violent abuse, and his subsequent attempts to nurture the child back to health, rupture the gendered stereotypes informing Mother Ireland as nurturer.

Ultimately, Michael, too, emigrates to America. Alone, one individual proves incapable of rectifying this enervating society. But for Michael there remains one final task. He has already waked Thomas with an all-night vigil in the old farm shed, and he has buried the boy in the killeen where each "white stone" marks the grave "of a child, buried unbaptised" (142). All his life, Michael knew what the killeen "contained" (142). He accepted the church dogma taught at school that committed infants to such a fate "all for a drop of water and a Sign of the Cross" (142). Neither did he question why children were born and then were suddenly "dead...or killed, or not acknowledged" but taken to the killeen "in a shoe box or a blanket, and placed in the ground, in a hole" (142). Michael now understands, questions and rejects a society constructed on such anomalies. But, he too will mark the landscape with a "white stone" for his nephew, thereby inscribing Thomas' story in the traditional vestige of communal containment:

With his hands, Michael hollowed out the hump of grassy soil and then, kneeling so that the grave was like a bed between his legs he pressed the block of stone onto it and pressed the earth back against the edges of the stone.... Born far away from Adrigole, the dead child was now a part of its life, growing with the grass into its landscape. He, Michael, born and reared in that place, was the alien. (158-9)

Michael's self-conscious marking of the landscape is simultaneously non-traditional, for in this masculine marking Leland subverts post-independent Ireland's markedly feminine inscription of Irish landscape and of Irish culture.[31] Thomas' stone will eventually, like the surrounding stones, sink back into a landscape that failed to sustain life. But each sunken stone in Leland's killeen leaves its indentation on the landscape, and it is in these indentations that the temporal nature of Ireland's architecture of containment is

made manifest: each stone resonates with a story equally traumatic as Thomas'; each indentation resonates in the "narrative retellings" emanating from contemporary Ireland today.

Like these stones in the killeen, Kathy Prendergast's drawings and Mary Leland's novel not only annotate each other in significant ways, they also exist in a state of dependency with each other. As such, both works of art—the visual and the written—provide a corrective to the "Official" narrative of the Irish nation, and consequently signal the possibility that "narrative retellings" can facilitate justice and recovery from the wrongs of the past.[32] Luke Gibbons in his recent lecture, "Doing Justice to the Past: The Great Famine as Cultural Memory," presented as part of the Irish government's desire to bring the official commemoration of the famine to the Diaspora throughout North America, calls for a similar "narrative retelling" in order to deal with the cultural trauma of the Great Famine. Gibbons suggests that it was only possible some 150 years after the traumatic events of 1845-49 for Irish people to have the "confidence" in order to "create the cultural space" to deal with this "ordeal of colonialism." He concludes:

Memory, then, is not just a matter of retention or recollection but of finding the narrative forms and sites of memory that will do justice to this troubled inheritance without sanitizing it, but also without succumbing to it. There are those who insist that all these events are firmly behind us, but the cultural experience of catastrophe demonstrates, on the contrary, that the past is not over until its story has been told.[33]

I do not mean to suggest that the traumas experienced by individuals in post-independent Ireland can be equated with the "catastrophe" of the famine. I do suggest that it is equally important for the victims of post-independent Ireland to be able to put their past behind them, and consequently their stories too must enter the cultural memory by being told.

Notes

1 Dinneen 1996. For a fuller discussion on "child death" practices in Ireland and the regional nature of killeens, see O'Connor 1991, pp. 66-73.

2 In addition to the "stories" I outline below, I consider the "X"- case, the Eamon Casey affair, the Brendan Smyth affair, the Kelly Fitzgerald Inquiry, the Madonna House Inquiry, and numerous others, as part of this movement towards greater visibility, and consequently greater accountability. A further example of this same trend are the numerous inquiries into government practices, e.g. The Beef tribunal, The Hepatitis C tribunal, and currently, the Dunnes Stores tribunal.

3 Holmquist 1997; McCormack 1997.

4 O'Faolain 1993; Ireland 1995; Cooper 1993.

5 Winterbottom 1994; O'Toole 1994b; On Doyle's reaction to criticism of *Family*, see O'Toole 1994a.

6 Lentin 1996; Ferguson 1996b.

7 I want to suggest that the impact of such stories increased with each reproduction across different media, that is to say on television, radio, film, newspapers, biography, memoir, and fiction. For example, Lavinia Kerwick's impact on Irish society, crystallized by her initial appearance on television, was enhanced by the follow-up stories in the press covering the trial and fallout from the trial, and is now reiterated by the biographical account just published. The *Dear Daughter* documentary led to a massive public debate (i.e. news shows, appearance of victims on TV and radio talk shows, and numerous print stories) in the months subsequent to its airing in February 1996. Roddy Doyle's *Family* made its impact felt again in his subsequent best-selling novel *The Woman Who Walked into Doors*, as did the infamous "X"- case in its most recent articulation in Edna O'Brien's fictional treatment *Down by the River*. See Doyle 1996; O'Brien 1996.

8 In his most recent book, *Postnationalist Ireland: Politics, Culture, Philosophy*, Richard Kearney asserts the need to deconstruct the "Official Story" of the nation-state which presents itself as Official History "into the open plurality of stories that make it up." According to Kearney, this plurality of stories indicates a "political or ethical community where identity is part of a permanent process of narrative retelling," and where "every citizen's story is related" and thus exists in a state of dependency with each other. In linking the concepts of "narrative retelling" and "dependency," Kearney provides, I suggest, a way of re-reading "stories," emerging with increasing frequency in recent years, from those victimized by Ireland's "Official Story." See Kearney 1997, pp. 61-65.

9 Ferguson 1996a. Ferguson, a leading social studies academic in Ireland, makes this specific claim with respect to the government's initial decision not to publish the Kelly Fitzgerald Report. The rationale for this decision was that the report compromised Health Care professionals in the Western Health Board who failed to intervene on behalf of this fifteen year old girl who was systematically abused and died within five months of returning from England to her parents' home.

10 On Ireland's "spectrum of denial," see O'Faolain 1996. The Kerry Babies tribunal was held to examine the behavior of Irish police in their handling of the case against Joanne Hayes, the young 24 year old woman, charged with murder of two infants found dead in Kerry in 1984, see McCafferty 1985. Ann Lovett was the fifteen year old girl from Granard, Co. Longford who, in early 1984, died together with her new born infant after giving birth behind the town's grotto to the Virgin Mary, see McCafferty 1984, pp. 48-54. Eileen Flynn was dismissed from her teaching post in early 1984 because she gave birth to a child outside marriage, see McCafferty 1984, pp. 55-7.

11 Leland 1986. All further references to *The Killeen* refer to this edition, and will be cited parenthetically in the text with page numbers.

12 Hanrahan 1990, p. 6.

13 Ibid.

14 Aidan Dunne also implies this relationship, see Dunne 1987, p. 63.

15 By architecture of containment, I mean not only literal sites of confinement, i.e. institutions such as orphanages, mother and child homes, magdalen laundries, adoption agencies, etc., but also both the legislation that inscribed such institutions together with official and public discourses that resisted admitting to the existence and function of such sites. This architecture of containment served the nation state: its function, to confine and render invisible segments of the population whose very existence threatened the vision of Ireland enshrined by de Valera's constitution in 1937. Namely, these groups were composed of unmarried mothers, illegitimate children, abandoned children, orphans, the sexually promiscuous, the socially transgressive and, frequently, those guilty of "being in the way." In addition, the architecture I am outlining was ascribed a regulatory function by the state and, consequently, it served as a bulwark to a post-colonial nativist morality, i.e. the existence of such sites of confinement was a constant reminder of the social morals deemed appropriate in Catholic Ireland of the time, and of the consequences awaiting transgressors of this morality.

16 A number of Irish feminist critics have in recent years examined this fusion in the image of Mother Ireland, and particularly with respect to male assertions of political power in the post-colonial moment. Geraldine Meaney, Carol Coulter, Toni O'Brien Johnson and David Cairns are influenced by Ashis Nandy, the post-colonial critic, who argues that "western sexual stereotypes" produce "a cultural consensus in which political and socio-economic dominance symbolized the dominance of men and masculinity over women and femininity." According to the aforementioned Irish critics, the newly independent Ireland reproduced this gender division and imposed rigid gender roles so as to assert the masculinity and right to power of the newly liberated male subjects. See Nandy 1983, p. 4; Meaney 1994, p. 194; Coulter 1993, p. 23; O'Brien Johnson and Cairns 1991, p. 5.

17 The most succinct account of this re-positioning is given by Ailbhe Smyth who argues that the "liberation of the state implies male role-shift from that of Slave to Master, Margin to Center, Other to Self. Women, powerless under patriarchy, are maintained as Other of the ex-Other, colonized of the post-colonized," see Smyth 1991, p. 11. On the resultant "simplification" of Irish women, see Boland 1994, p. 81.

18 Ireland 1937, Article 41.

19 Coulter 1993, p. 25. Sighle Bhreathnach-Lynch, in a paper presented to the Association of Art Historians Conference, London, April 1997 also points to the 1925 Civil Service Amendment Act and the 1927 Juries Bill as further legislative vehicles by which to "curtail and restrict the role of women in Irish public life," see Bhreathnach-Lynch 1997. I am grateful to Dr. Bhreathnach-Lynch for sharing her paper with me and for reading an earlier version of this essay.

20 Meaney 1994, p. 191.

21 For a more complete reading of Prendergast's drawings, and particularly the text, see Nash 1994, p. 232; Joyce 1990, pp. 7-12; and, in this catalogue, see Pamela Berger's essay.

22 Nash 1994, p. 227.

23 Nash 1994, p. 236. For further discussion of this reconfiguration of female iconography, see Adele Dalsimer and Vera Kreilkamp's essay in this catalogue. Angela Bourke, in her recent plenary address presented to the American Conference For Irish Studies Annual Meeting in Albany, New York, echoed Nash's distinction by pointing to the "official preference" in post-independent Ireland for Peig Sayer's narrative of life on the Blaskett Islands rather than Eric Cross's more problematic *The Tailor and Anstey*. See Bourke 1997; Sayers 1974; Cross 1970.

24 Nash 1994, p. 237.

25 In 1985, set against the context of the Abortion Amendment (1983) and then the Kerry Babies, Ann Lovett and Eileen Flynn cases (1984), a series of moving statues phenomena of the Virgin Mary occurred throughout Ireland, and in a number of instances, these moving statues were particularly visible to young women. See Tóibín 1995.

26 Adrigole's connection with "The Hidden Ireland" is suggested in the novel when, after reading the introduction to Corkery's chapter on "The Court of Poetry," Sister Thomas praises Margaret Coakley's accent as that "from the country" Corkery is describing. Sister Thomas, almost immediately, goes on to criticize Corkery's own impaired vision when it comes to seeing the reality behind his idealized landscape (20-1). Margaret's pregnancy further undermines this connection in that she can no longer represent "the spirit of Ireland as a majestic and radiant maiden." See Corkery 1989, pp. 95, 128.

27 Rita Duffy's painting *Scullery* (no. 20, pl. VII) and its suggested depiction of child abuse is a further example of this re-inscription of Mother Ireland. See Adele Dalsimer and Vera Kreilkamp's essay in this catalogue for a discussion of this painting. For a different reading of this same image, see Claude Cernuschi's essay in this same catalogue.

28 Similar official blindness to domestic abuse is captured and made evident in Roddy Doyle's title to his novel treating this subject. See Doyle 1996.

29 The "keen" refers to the Irish "caoin," or lamentation for the dead, traditionally performed by women in the community. For further information on the "caoin," see Bourke 1993.

30 Kristin Morrison makes a similar point regarding Michael's mutilation in her chapter "Child Murder and Colonial Exploitation," see Morrison 1993, p. 73.

31 I am grateful to my colleague at Boston College, Kate Costello-Sullivan, for helping me think this idea through.

32 Kearney 1997, p. 66.

33 Gibbons 1996.

Abbreviations

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PHILIP O'LEARY

Rounding Up the Ubiquitous Suspects: Kitsch, Camp, and Cultural Anxiety in Finola Jones' *LUSCIOUS—(an aesthetic view of culture)*

Doubtless the first response provoked in the viewer on coming face to face (or faces!) with Finola Jones' *LUSCIOUS—(an aesthetic view of culture)* (no. 45, pl. XV) is a shocked, bemused recognition. After all, one has seen, and even owned, the like of so many of the gewgaw figurines fixed face-forward on the wall. A more considered reaction might, however, be to ask what, if anything, is Irish about the installation, or indeed whether such a question is even relevant. But that is precisely one of the more challenging issues the installation raises. An Irish viewer will, in all probability, be as much at home with this campy pantheon as an American, or a Briton, or an Anglo-Canadian, and still more familiar with these four hundred-plus characters than would be a viewer from outside the English-speaking world.

Obviously it was the universal Church that, through holy pictures and statues, introduced generations of Irish Catholics to an extraordinary cast of saints, ex-saints, and pseudo-saints. Some of whom, like the Blessed Virgin, St. Anthony of Padua, St. Bridget and St. Martin de Porres, appear in LUSCIOUS (the Virgin appears repeatedly, each time in a in different guise). Like their counterparts everywhere in the western world, young Irish Catholics have long forgotten most of the intricate minutiae of hagiographic iconography that enabled their parents and grandparents to tell one saintly player from another. But it is the modern mass media, in particular the comics, movies, and television, that have made it probable that young Irish Catholics will instantly recall hours spent in the company of Mickey and the whole Disney gang, Groucho Marx, Popeye the Sailor, Fred Flintstone, Batman, Bart Simpson, Lieutenant Worf, and Hulk Hogan, all of whom are among Jones' assemblage.

LUSCIOUS is not the first assemblage of figures and images of U.S. pop iconography to appear in Irish culture. In 1923, James Joyce, of all people, offered a similar collection of "the tribal images of many Irish heroes and heroines of antiquity" in the sculpted "row of seastones which dangled at every movement of...the portentous frame" of his arch-patriot and anti-semite The Citizen in *Ulysses*.[1] Among impeccably orthodox cultural and patriotic icons like Cú Chulainn, Conn Cétchathach, Eoghan Rua O Néill, Wolfe Tone, and Father Eugene O'Growney, we also find a few Yanks—The Last of the Mohicans, Benjamin Franklin, Boss Croker of Tammany Hall, and John L. Sullivan. In Jones's vision, however, scattered examples of American influence on Irish popular consciousness have multiplied exponentially, so that a lonely kitsch leprechaun stands surrounded by Donald Duck and friends, all watched over by G.I. Joe and a Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle.

Jones is by no means the only Irish artist to attempt to bring the fact of this relentless cultural expansion and assimilation to the attention of those experiencing it on a daily basis. Writing in 1925 in the journal *An Lóchrann*, the folklorist Pádraig Ó Siochfhradha (who wrote under the pseudonym "An Seabhac" ["The Hawk"]), asserted:

"There is a big difference between the person who has learned Irish but who finds his spiritual pleasure and satisfaction in Shakespeare, and in Dickens, and in Robin Hood, and in Robert Emmet, and the person who derives that pleasure from Egan O'Rahilly and Raftery and the Churl of the Grey Cloak and Seán O'Dwyer of the Glen. One of them gets his spiritual sustenance from the civilization of another people and

it is to them he will always turn in intellectual matters whether willingly or unconsciously. But the other person gets his spiritual sustenance from the soul and mind of his own people."[2]

One can only wonder what Ó Siochfhradha would now say about the infiltration of the Irish psyche, not by the high English culture of Shakespeare and Dickens, but (as suggested by the disproportionate representation of American figures in Jones' work) by the myriad denizens of America's media wastelands, whether animated, fictional, or in whatever state of being that Elvis continues to exist.

The pervasive presence of America's pop culture icons in the Irish consciousness has been a consistent theme in a fair bit of Irish writing in the past decade or so. One thinks, for example, of the importance of John F. Kennedy as a potent, if often ambivalent (and even ironic), symbol in Patrick McCabe's 1989 novel *Carn*, or even more powerfully in Tom Murphy's 1985 play *Conversations on a Homecoming*. In this latter work, reference is also made to Jack Lemmon, Paul Newman, Al Pacino, Hopalong Cassidy, and Louis Jordan, one of the founders of rock-and-roll and the composer of, among other hits from the '40s, *Is You Ain't Ma Baby?* (1946) and *Saturday Night Fish Fry* (1949).[3]

The equivocal influence of American pop music inspired Roddy Doyle's 1987 novel *The Commitments*, although the fact is obscured in the film version by its focus on the soul singer Wilson Pickett, rather than on the far more culturally significant, and troubling, figure of James Brown, the idol of the young Dubliners in the novel. In addition, the movie chose to foreground the parallels between race and social class, while the novel, though by no means marginalizing that issue, more rigorously questions the extent to which young, working-class Irish people derive their most hopeful mythologies from the US entertainment and publicity machine. While the film ends with the characters realizing too late that their returned Yank trumpeter could indeed have introduced them to Wicked Wilson himself, the novel concludes with most members of the now-dissolved soul band re-inventing themselves as an Irish incarnation of the '60s American folk-rock group The Byrds.[4]

Neither Brown, Pickett, nor The Byrds have, however, made a fraction of the impact on the Irish popular mind made by Elvis Presley. One thinks at once of the portrait of the singer that shares wall space with Pope John Paul II in the Rabbitte home in *The Commitments*. But Elvis, living or dead, is also the major imaginative presence in works as diverse as Mark Watters' play *Last of the Irish Indians* (1989), in which young men from the West of Ireland of 1962 draw the imaginative sustenance they need from weekly showings of Presley's seemingly countless formula movies.[5] Antoine Ó Flatharta's play *Grásta i Meiriceá* (1990), in which two Irish illegals in New York pool their resources to visit the King's grave in Memphis; and the 1986 film *Eat the Peach*, in which the Elvis movie *Roustabout* inspires two redundant workers in the Irish midlands to try to create a future for themselves.[6]

For all of these late twentieth-century Irish characters, as was true of Didi and Gogo before them in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, it is their hope that enables them to go on. It seems, in the end, that it is a chimeric hope; one that can leave those who embrace it unable to go home again, and those who try to root themselves in America as lost as Murphy's Michael in *Conversations*, who found that the reality portrayed by the ubiquitous popular images told him little of consequence.

No one has made this point more explicitly or forcefully than Ó Flatharta, one of whose characters says after their disillusioning visit to Graceland:

"We are home. We weren't born here; we weren't raised here; but it's here we will be. Two more cowboys. Two more cowboys in the Heartbreak Hotel. I'll make a phonecall home and I'll tell them that I'm staying here. I'll tell them that I bought a cowboy hat. My father will laugh and ask me whether I've killed any Indians yet. I have. I have. I've killed hundreds."[7]

In this light it is no wonder that one of the role models the bewildered Packie Dudgeon plays around with in Patrick McCabe's 1995 novel *The Dead School* is Joe Buck, the lost and hapless would-be gigolo from Texas played by Jon Voight in the 1969 movie *Midnight Cowboy*.[8]

NO. 45, DETAIL (P. 52)
Finola Jones
LUSCIOUS—(an aesthetic view of culture)
Installation view, The Gallery, Dublin Rd., Belfast
1993 - ongoing
Wall-attached figurines
Dimensions variable
Collection of the Artist, Dublin
Courtesy of Green on Red Gallery, Dublin

The Québecois novelist and playwright Michel Tremblay in his 1976 musical play *Les Heros de mon enfance* confronted anxieties stemming from the effects of a sustained cultural onslaught from abroad on a small nation—certainly anxieties with which his Irish counterparts could identify. Motivated by what he termed "the need to laugh at the European cultural references and myths" (le besoin de rire des références culturelles et des mythes européenes),[9] he is apparently saving the Anglo-American and Anglo-Canadian baggage for a future housecleaning. Tremblay has his initially one-dimensional, all-but-programmed characters undergo a series of farcical, transformational encounters involving, among others, Carabosse, Cendrillon (Cinderella), Le Chaperon Rouge (Little Red Riding Hood), the Wolf, le Petit Poucet (a French Tom Thumb), and le Prince Charmant. All of these characters regularly take notice of, address themselves to, and involve the audience in their growing self-awareness, as they begin to shed their predetermined roles for more flexible and individual potentials.

The challenge for Jones—and her audiences—is to generate some of the same rambunctious fluidity that characterizes Tremblay's stage world in *Les Heros de mon enfance*. In a very real and ever renewed sense, the success or failure of *LUSCIOUS—(an aesthetic view of culture)* is always in the eye of each and every beholder.

Notes

1 Joyce 1961, pp. 296-97. Of course The Citizen's bullying xenophobia underscores the converse danger of drawing the overwhelming bulk of one's stock of metaphors from putatively homogeneous native sources. But that's a whole other essay.

2 Ó Siochfhradha 1925, p. 1. "Is mór idir an duine d'fhoghlamuigh Gaedhilg ach a gheibheann taithneamh agus sásamh a anma i Shécspéar agus i nDicens agus i Robin Hood agus i Robert Emmet agus an duine eile a gheibheann an taithneamh san as Aodhgán Ó Rathghaille agus Raftairi agus Bodach an Chóta Lachtna agus Seán Ó Duibhir an Ghleanna. Duine aca—gheibheann sé biadh a anma as sibhialtacht cine eile agus is leo a chlaonfaidh sé choidhche i gcúrsaí inntleachta dá thoil nó gan fios dó féin; ach gheibheann an duine eile cothú a anma as aigne a chine féin."

3 Murphy 1986. See, for example, pp. 15-16, 32.

4 Doyle 1989.

5 This play was first performed by Soho Poly Theatre in London on 17 April, 1989 as part of its "Workstage" series to introduce new plays by young writers. It has not to my knowledge been published.

6 Ormrod 1986.

7 Ó Flatharta 1990, p. 60. An English-language version of the play under the title *Grace in America* was given a staged reading in London's Royal Court Theatre Upstairs in April, 1989. The English text has not been published. "Tá muid sa mbaile. Níor rugadh ann muid; níor tógadh ann muid, ach is ann a bheas muid. Dhá cowboy eile. Dhá cowboy eile sa Heartbreak Hotel. Déanfaidh mé phone-call abhaile is déarfa mé leo go bhfuil mé fanacht anseo. Déarfa mé leo gur cheannaigh mé hata cowboy. Déanfaidh m'athair gáire is fiafróidh sé díom ar mharaigh mé aon Indians fós. Mharaigh. Mharaigh mé. Mharaigh mé céadta."

8 See, for example, McCabe 1996, p. 68. It should be noted that Francie Brady, the psychotic young protagonist of McCabe's *The Butcher Boy*, is also obsessed with the popular media, but the sources of his fantasies are drawn mostly from British pop culture. See, for example, MacCabe 1992, p. 53. Both John F. Kennedy and John Wayne do, however, figure in this novel.

9 Tremblay 1976, p. 8.

Abbreviations

Doyle 1989
Doyle, Roddy. *The Commitments*. New York, 1989.

Ormond 1986
Eat the Peach. Dir. Peter Ormrod. Strongbow Productions, 1986.

Joyce 1961
Joyce, James. *Ulysses*. New York, 1961.

McCabe 1992
McCabe, Patrick. *The Butcher Boy*. London, 1992.

McCabe 1996
McCabe, Patrick. *The Dead School*. New York, 1996.

McCabe 1997
McCabe, Patrick. *Carn*. New York, 1997.

Murphy 1986
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Ó Flatharta 1990
Ó Flatharta, Antoine. *Grásta i Meiriceá*. Indreabhán, 1990.

Ó Siochfhradha 1925
Ó Siochfhradha, Pádraig. "Gaelachas," *An Lóchrann*, November, 1925.

Tremblay 1976
Tremblay, Michel. *Les Heros de mon enfance*. Ottawa, 1976.

Watters 1989
Watters, Mick. *Last of the Irish Indians*. Unpublished play, staged at Soho Poly Theatre, London, April, 1989.



PAMELA BERGER

Modern Propagators of Ancient Legends and Traditions: Mythic Memory or Serendipity?

Ireland's distant past is known to us in several ways: through archaeological discoveries which have uncovered structures and objects that are hundreds and sometimes thousands of years old; through classical Roman writings such as those of Julius Caesar or Diodorus Siculus; and through the great Irish epics such as the *Cattle Raid of Cooley* (*Táin Bo Cuailnge*).[1] It is from these and other sources that we can form a picture of ancient cultural traditions in Ireland. I propose to explore three of those traditions in the hope of illuminating some themes in the art works displayed in the exhibition *Re/Dressing Cathleen*: representations of the body and landscape; the "Celtic head"; and the sheela-na-gig. Although the artists themselves may be only distantly aware of the traditions that this essay describes, the visual language that they employ has its roots in Ireland's cultural heritage, and may have influenced their work.

THE BODY AND LANDSCAPE

The ancient cultures of Ireland, from the Neolithic through the Celtic periods, were centered around the idea of the sacredness of the land.[2] Many configurations of the landscape still retain place-names linked to their earlier mythic associations. Specific topographical features, including rivers, springs, rocks and clearings are imbued with mythic significance; an important part of the Irish learned tradition is called *dindshenchas*, a word which means the lore of famous places. Among the most highly charged of these natural features are hills and mountain tops, and, from the evidence of place names, we know that in pre-Christian Ireland twin rounded hills were seen as the breasts of the reclining earth mother goddess.[3]

Ireland and the Celtic lands of Europe[4] are not the only places where natural features took on a special magico-religious import. To cite two other examples, Native Americans are known to have given mythic significance to mountains, rocks, waters, and other aspects of the landscape. Many of the towns and natural features in New England have names that relate to Native American mythology and folklore. The Ancient Greeks likewise saw sacred elements in landscape. There, twin hills were sometimes viewed as a goddess' breasts, and when the "breasts" were in proximity to another single earth swelling—a swelling that was the right size and appropriately oriented—the Greeks saw in that configuration the body of the earth mother goddess, with the swelling viewed as a pregnant belly and the hills as full rounded breasts. On occasion, Greek temples were situated on those "sacred mounds," right on the "pregnant belly," and oriented toward the "breasts."

In Ireland, one such example of an earth mother goddess manifest in the land occurs in Killarney. There, two hills, which have the configuration of breasts, have long borne the name Paps Anu, or the Breasts of Anu.[5] The idea of seeing landscape as breasts and bellies is used in an ironic way in the *Body Map Series* by the artist Kathy Prendergast. In several of her drawings included in the exhibition at Boston College's McMullen Museum of Art, *To Alter a Landscape* (no. 26), *To Control a Landscape—Irrigation* (no. 28, pl. VIII), and *To Control a Landscape—Oasis* (no. 29), Prendergast makes breasts into landscape configurations which are then pierced, infiltrated and "inhabited" by the wheels, cogs and pumps of irrigation machinery. In *To Alter a*

Landscape, (no. 26) milk ducts are shown as white, and become industrial pipelines, while nipples become spouts for the fluid. In *To Control a Landscape—Irrigation* (no. 28, pl. VIII), ducts become molten lava passages. The discomfort which her images evoke is attenuated by the humor implicit in the texts that she has inscribed on the page, texts that are similar to those written on an engineer's drawings.[6]

Breasts are not the only body images evoked in Prendergast's work. In *To Control a Landscape—Oasis* (no. 29) the image appears to be the profile view of a giant, reclining woman, with her head to the right and her tiny legs to the left. Once more the "human" form is penetrated, this time at what would be the navel. The piercing drill-like instrument penetrates the body to its deepest core. The image is disturbing, for it connotes a technological invasion which grates on our sensibility. Again the text remains aloof, explanatory, and bitterly ironic. Surely, neither the land nor the body is meant to be violated in this way, but the artist's tone, in both text and image, is seemingly technical and removed.

Prendergast's body maps—for example, *Enclosed Worlds in Open Spaces* (no. 22)—also evoke the notion of body as landscape. In the Celtic world, in both Gaul as well as Ireland, boundaries had a magico-religious import. The boundaries between land and sea, and the borders between forest and meadow, were often the site of sacred shrines. Prendergast uses the idea of the map as a designator of contours and boundaries, and she makes those boundaries coincide with the female shape. Thus the body itself becomes the abstract indicator of boundary configurations. The contours of the body of the woman are, in her work, the shore between land and water; waves are finely indicated. Boats are drawn upon the empty space, thereby aiding us to read that space as water, and a sign on the left indicates the points of the compass. A grid is superimposed over the image to indicate longitude and latitude. The placement of certain "sites" is indicated by nipples, the navel, and the central line of the rib cage.

NO. 16 (P. 56)
Eithne Jordan
Portrait of a Woman
1988
oil on canvas
51 x 43 in.
Courtesy of Rubicon Gallery, Dublin

Although Prendergast is, no doubt, unaware of her forerunners in this regard, one such precursor is a rather obscure 14th century Italian. In drawings done after a visionary experience and an "illness," the monk Opicinus de Canistris (1296-1352) created strange, intriguing "body maps." Opicinus tells us that he made his drawings in secret after a sickness incapacitated the writing hand he used as an official scribe at the papal court of Avignon. He executed the strangely provocative body maps between 1334 and 1337, at a time when coastline maps were first drawn by Italian map makers. The body map entitled *Africa Whispering into the Ear of Europe* (fig. 9), executed c. 1337, is an example of bifocal vision. When viewed from the side (the south), Europe is rendered as the body of a woman, and Africa is a male whispering in her ear. When the drawing is viewed from the east, however, the ocean and the sea are depicted as malicious, threatening bodies. The Atlantic becomes a wolf that has swallowed the upper part of a human being, and the Mediterranean takes the form of an ogre who appears to punch his fist between the legs of the woman, at a spot indicated as Venice on the body map. Above the ogre's fist, around Padua, is a minuscule version of the larger drawing, with Europe now rendered as a man. The area, defined in red, looks like a wound. It is curious that this "wound" surrounds Padua, the birthplace of Opicinus.

Prendergast's body map is far less complex, and her rendering is serene in comparison to Opicinus' work. The head and legs of her woman are not depicted. In fact, the form appears truncated. The pose, though in full frontal nudity, is not a sexual one. Prendergast had the freedom of rendering the body far more naturalistically since she does not have to adhere to already-established map boundaries. However, neither artist chose to model the bodies, and neither gave any texture to the epidermis. Both chose to write on their figures, to emphasize the pudenda or genitals, and to give us an indication of compass direction.

Prendergast and Opicinus were drawn to the process of seeing one thing in terms of another. When an artist creates body maps, he or she is essentially transporting themselves above the earth, to an omniscient perspective. The artist is looking down from an elevated position at lands and waters that he or she has created in the art work. This is a lofty position indeed. Opicinus could only render his images in secret, and he explained his strange drawings to himself by avowing that, in some miraculous way (through an illness) he had been permitted to create

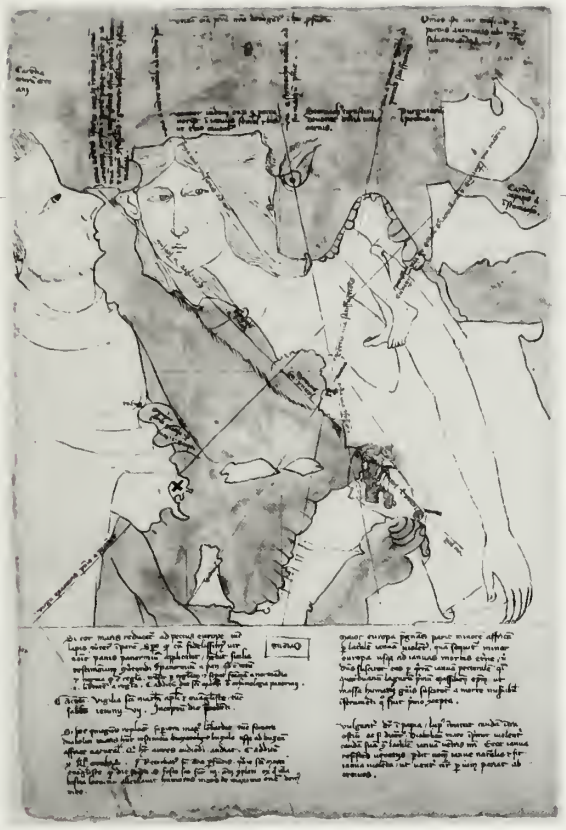


FIG. 9
Opicinus de Canistris
Pavia, 1296-1352
Africa Whispering into the Ear of Europe
c. 1334-37
pen on paper in color
Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS. Vat. lat. 6435, fol. 53v
Courtesy of the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vatican City

surreptitiously what he called "spiritual" work. Prendergast, although working within the restrictions of her own day, did not have to convince herself that whatever one might find "outrageous" in her work was due to an "illness," a "vision," or a "spiritual" directive.

THE CELTIC HEAD

The enormous heads and seemingly insignificant, spindly bodies of Eithne Jordan's *Split Face* (no. 15, pl. V) and *Portrait of a Woman* (no. 16) evoke an important visual tradition in Irish art that spans nearly two millennia: the Celtic head.[7] The veneration of the human head was a central element in ancient Celtic mythology. Long before the Celts settled in Ireland, when their cultural-linguistic group was still located in continental Europe, the head was seen as the seat of human potency.[8] In the ancient Irish epic the *Táin*, the head was viewed as the essence of a human being: when one possessed the head of an enemy, one controlled the enemy's power. This belief is attested to when the hero of the *Táin*, Cu Chulainn, carries off a rival's head, thereby depriving his enemies of their vital forces and demonstrating his own skill and valor.[9]

The *Táin* records how Cu Chulainn carried the heads that he severed back in his chariot to his camp where they would be exhibited. The idea of displaying severed heads of enemies finds archaeological corroboration in the grim Celto-Ligurian shrines of Entremont, where niches were carved to hold human skulls, some of which were still in place when the shrines were uncovered. Classical authors corroborate this Celtic penchant for preserving human heads as trophies. Diodorus Seculus and Strabo record that the Celts returned from battle with their bloody spoils hanging from the necks of their horses. They embalmed these trophies in cedar oil, thereby allowing the heads of their most distinguished enemies to be properly displayed.

Pre-Christian Ireland left archaeological remains of this Celtic fascination with the head. An art work from Corleck is a particularly striking example (fig. 10). A small hole in its base indicates that, like other stone heads of its type in Europe, it was set up on a pillar for display. There is also a small hole in the mouth, another feature held in common with Celtic heads in Ireland and on the continent. This head has three faces, making it an example of the important notion of triplism, an idea deeply rooted in Indo-European myth.[10]



FIG. 10
Corleck Head
Corleck, Co. Cavan, c. 1st century A.D
stone
Courtesy of the National Museum of Ireland, Dublin

The emphasis on the head in Celtic culture was incorporated into medieval Irish art as well, for works in stone, precious metals, and on parchment display the human head. The western portal of St. Brendan's Cathedral in Clonfert, Co., Galway has an eerie display of human heads. Over the multiple arches is a decorative pediment; the lower part of the pediment has five blind arches, each containing a human head. Above, in inverted isosceles triangles, are more skull-like reliefs. Set up in this form, the displayed heads bear a resemblance to the pillars with skulls in their niches at Entremont. But the meaning of the heads in the Romanesque Christian context is unclear. Perhaps folk memory retained the idea of the potent spirit encapsulated in the human head.

Besides infiltrating the repertoire of monumental sculpture on churches, heads are also inserted on the exquisitely wrought Tara Brooch, where two grim faces are found on the chain attachment. Used as a clasp for a cloak or other garment, brooches such as these must have been worn by people of the highest status in society, for the *Táin* tells us that a prophetess from the continent wore such a broach in the pre-Christian period. Medieval book illumination likewise incorporated the human head as one of the elements it retained from pagan imagery. The Chi Rho page of the *Book of Kells*[11] is one example of the many heads that populate the richly articulated imagery of that masterpiece.

Has the ancient head motif found a new form in the work of this twentieth century artist who seems fascinated by the expressive possibilities of the iconic human head? Another Irish artist, Louis le Brocquy, has been so inspired. His late '70s and early '80s paintings inventively incorporate the head motif.[12] Has Eithne Jordan also incorporated into her visual memory this deeply-rooted tradition? The idea of transforming the head motif into a metaphor for power or ripeness is certainly explicit in her work and in her words.[13]

THE SHEELA-NA-GIG

Hidden amongst the corbels and capitals on the churches and castles of medieval Ireland were extraordinary figures traditionally called sheela-na-gigs. Large almond-shaped female genitalia dominated the lower half of their bodies, and above, staring eyes glowered out at the viewer (fig. 11). Although the Romanesque churches of France (for instance, in Poitou) displayed a variety of unusual forms that bare some kinship with the sheela-na-gig, the Irish figures are distinguished by their blatant display of female sexual parts.

The meaning of these figures in their medieval context is controversial. Various suggestions have been offered. Were these sculptures meant to be apotropaeic, i.e., to protect the church or castle from evil? Were they designed to warn the beholder of the malicious influences of lust? Could they have been part of a continuum of forms created in other, less permanent media, such as clay or straw sculptures that were originally intended as positive images of fertility? We know that fertility figures were part of agrarian ritual since settled farming began. Those who depended on the land for sustenance created numerous rituals to propitiate the powers they saw as controlling the earth's fertility. Those powers were personified as an earth mother goddess into whose belly the seed would be placed. Folklore and ritual suggest how closely the fertility of women was linked with the fertility of the land. Thus, perhaps, the birth canal and its threshold could have been viewed as not only the revered portal of human life, but also, through sympathetic magic, as a powerful symbol of the generative forces of the earth's fertility.

In the work of Eilís O'Connell, the positive aspects of life's gateway are alluded to in the many reminiscences of the sheela-na-gig found in her work. In image after image, the striking almond-shaped aperture is significantly placed. Her visual language abstracts and uses the form in a variety of compositions, and on occasion accents a phallic shape (for example, no. 43) Her resurrection and interpretation of this shape endows it with a new feminist meaning, a meaning consonant with the wonder and mystery of fertility and birth.

A particularly interesting placement of the pointed oval shape is found in *Hot with Inward Heat* (fig. 12).[14] The work was created as a site-specific sculpture in Bath, a place where the hot springs were believed to be sacred by the Celts in pre-Roman times. In the Celtic world, springs gushing up from the earth were viewed as magical. There are numerous continental Celtic sites where such springs formed the core of a therapeutic center. (One example of such a center is at the site of the source of the Seine river; another is located at Les Bolards in Burgundy.)[15] The deities worshipped at these sites were largely female. O'Connell recalls that she was intrigued by the fact that the springs in Bath had a therapeutic use even before the Roman period.[16] Thus she chose to adorn the site with

a sculpture figuring the "hot with inward heat" of the earth's body exuding from a vaginal shape.

Another work which uses the shape is *Secret Station* (fig. 13). Again the oval opening finds its place in the upper part of a conic structure. Although this work relates to the industrial history of Cardiff Bay, O'Connell uses the form to suggest regeneration, a motif consonant with this pointed oval in her other work.

Although the work of the Irish women artists presented in the exhibition *Re/Dressing Cathleen* can be contextualized against broader, Western artistic movements, there is a particularity to their work that reflects the artists' land of origin. This essay has attempted to illuminate certain themes and images that connect the work of these women to a distant past, not only to the past of modern day Ireland, but to a mythic past common to the Celtic peoples. The woman's body as landscape, the power of the human head, and the reinterpretation of the vagina as a symbol of life and vital force are part of a cultural and visual language that belongs, in particular, to the Celtic-Irish culture. They were strongly manifest in pre-Christian art, and were syncretized into the culture and art of the Christian era as well. Now Irish women working at the end of the twentieth century are, perhaps unconsciously, incorporating these ancient themes into their work. The images can now resonate for a new generation and in a new form. The syncretism we are witnessing here, sometimes done playfully, and sometimes with great seriousness, promises to be most fruitful.

Notes

1 The earliest recursion of the *Tain* is preserved in two fragmentary, but overlapping, portions compiled between c. 1100 and the late-fourteenth century. See the 1976 edition edited by Cecile O'Rahilly.

2 The Neolithic period in Ireland began sometime toward the middle of the fourth millennium B.C. Continental Celtic peoples penetrated Ireland toward the end of the first millennium B.C. Although Ireland was Christianized at the end of the first quarter of the fifth century, many aspects of pagan Celtic Ireland survived well into the Christian period and even into modern times.

3 For a general discussion of this issue see Scully 1962 and MacCana 1991, p. 600.

4 The Celtic culture covered much of western Europe from the seventh century B.C. until the fifth century B.C. See Cunliffe 1979, pp. 15-17.

5 Anu is the goddess who figures in the Tuatha De Danann, the mother of the final generation of gods to rule the earth.

6 The text inscribed on *To Control a Landscape—Irrigation* (no. 28, pl. VIII) reads: "The fires being quenched, water is pumped into the core of the mountains and stored in tanks. The connecting tubes are attached to the tanks and as the mills turn water is pumped to the surface through volcanic ducts. Thus instead of emitting fire and smoke, the mountains will now exude water and irrigate the soil." See James Smith's essay in this catalogue for further discussion of this image and its inscribed text.

7 For further discussion of this visual tradition and its relationship to "the Troubles," see Robert Savage's essay in this catalogue.

8 Lambrecht 1954; Mac Cana 1981.

9 For further discussion of the *Tain* and the Celtic cult of the head, see the essay by Robert Savage in this catalogue.

10 For pre-Christian Ireland, an image represented thrice on one object—often called triplism—may have implied added strength or potency, the promotion of greater plenty or the power to protect in the after life. For a bibliography on the concept of triplism, see Berger 1982 pp. 9-14 .

11 Trinity College Library, Dublin, MS 58, A.1.6, f. 34r.

12 See Albany 1981.

13 See O'Regan 1994 for an interview with Eithne Jordan by Mairead Byrne.

14 For further discussion of O'Connell's large, public sculptures, see the essay by Katherine Nahum in this catalogue.

15 Berger 1984.

16 Gandon Books 1993, p. 12

Abbreviations

Albany 1981
Louis le Brocquy and the Celtic Head Image. New York State Museum and the State Education Department, Albany, 1981.

Berger 1982
Berger, Pamela. "Many-Shaped: Art, Archaeology, and the Táin," *Eire-Ireland*. Volume XVII, No. 4, Winter 1982, pp. 6 - 18.

Berger 1984
Berger, Pamela. "La Cybèle Bisexuée des Bolards," *Revue Archéologique de l'Est*, vol. 35, 1984.

Bompiani 1991
The Celts. Palazzo Grazzi. Bompiani, 1991.

Camille 1996
Camille, Michael. *Gothic Art: Glorious Visions*. New York, 1996.

Cunliffe 1979
Cunliffe, Barry. *The Celtic World*. New York, 1979.

Gandon Books 1993
Eilis O'Connell. The Gallery at John Jones, London and Gandon Books, Dublin, 1993.

Lambrecht 1954
Lambrecht, Pierre. *L'Exaltation de la Tête dans la Pensée et dans l'Art des Celtes*. Bruges, 1954.

Mac Cana 1984
Mac Cana, Proinsia. "The Cult of the Head," in *Louis le Brocquy and the Celtic Head Image*. Albany 1981.

Mac Cana 1991
Mac Cana, Proinsia. "Celtic Religion and Mythology," in *The Celts*. Milan, 1991, pp. 596-604.

O'Rahilly 1976
Tain Bó Cúailnge. Ed. Cecile O'Rahilly, Dublin, 1976.

O'Regan 1994
The Works Series, Works 16—Eithne Jordan. Ed. John O'Regan, Dublin, 1994.

Scully 1962
Scully, Vincent. *The Earth, the Temple and the Gods*. New York, 1962.



KATHERINE NAHUM

In the The Roundness of Being of Eilís O'Connell

Eilís O'Connell's sculpture works in complex ways. Organic and industrial forms merge coherently, and then the interaction between this paradoxical, succinct sculpture and its surround becomes electric. Her large, public, often commissioned works articulate the charged relation with land; her small private sculptures weld industrial forms with the mysteries of the female body.

O'Connell was born in Derry and studied at the Crawford School of Art in Cork. In 1974 she came in contact with the formalist principles and welding techniques of the English sculptor Anthony Caro through John Burke, "a teacher who revolutionized the school."[1] The very next year she studied in Boston at the Massachusetts College of Art where she became familiar with David Smith's work. A pure, formalist aesthetic informs O'Connell's sculpture; formalism constitutes a surface against which surge primordial natural forces, the fragmented female body, ancient land and Mother Ireland.

From childhood into adulthood O'Connell explored Ireland's prehistoric megaliths and circular stone forts. She came to define these monumental forms for herself as "sculpture." Artists like the Americans Michael Heizer and Robert Smithson who were making site-specific art, or earth art, inspired O'Connell's realization that "people in the States are trying to make these things, and we already have them."[2] The work of these artists made her appreciate the meaning of place and the aesthetic value of Ireland's ancient structures. O'Connell herself wanted to work in steel and to control where her larger works would be placed; she did not want to be controlled by the site, or to be "trapped" by it.[3] Thus, O'Connell's "mystery tours"[4] and ground plans of ancient monuments in the '70s, her familiarity with sheela-na-gigs —ancient carved female figures exposing and opening their vaginas—formed part of the sculptural language that she continues to confront and to fuse with modernist formalism today.

Although O'Connell's large-scale exterior sculptures have been termed phallic, they can be seen as the upright female figure whose form suggests and commingles ancient priestesses, slitted megaliths, trees, insect antennae and industrial stacks. More often than not, O'Connell pairs similar or echoing uprights that stand in tense relation to one other. Their relation to space, the land and its attendant meanings is charged. *Hot with Inward Heat* (fig. 12) at Bath juxtaposes two blackened, steel cones that have been vertically sliced in half. Their tops are cut away, creating "heads," and just below them vertical slits emit steam that blows or curls out into space. The pulse of animation within these monumental volumes plays against their taut black surfaces. The slits read ambiguously as eyes or vaginas, calling to mind O'Connell's avowed allusions to sheela-na-gigs, but they are also the very forms contained in the megaliths that she studied and wrote about for her thesis. Conflated references to priestesses or nuns, to ancient worship of the springs at Bath, and to the later Roman structures there, condense in a powerful monument.

Secret Station (fig. 13) whose title comes from "The Diviner" by Seamus Heaney, is part of a redevelopment scheme at Cardiff Bay, Wales, an old, once-industrialized coal port. Two patinated bronze cones rhythmically emit steam from slits during the day, and at night, a fiber-optic system throws changing

NO. 41 (P.62)
Eilís O'Connell
In the Roundness of Being
1996
cast resin, lead polish
52 x 11 x 5 in.
Courtesy of Green on Red Gallery, Dublin

colored light on opposing arcs that crown each cone; the light then reaches into the darkness. O'Connell has created a dynamic sculpture that activates the environment and alludes to the city's industrial as well as ancient past. She divines and relates these hidden sources to contemporary sites, as the rod exposes "Spring water suddenly broadcasting/ Through a green aerial its secret stations" in Heaney's poem.[5] Modern industry and ancient history are meant to be seen through one another; sources are conflated, and we are drawn to the mythic relation of past and present. The ghostly forms that float to the surfaces of Rita Duffy's cartooning, painful *Palimpsest* series of paintings (no. 17, pl. VI, nos. 18-20, pl. VII)—altogether different stylistically and politically—work in a similar way because we are made to compare specter with specific personage.

O'Connell admires the American architect Frank Gehry, known for his American Center in Paris, for Tower Records here in Boston, and for the Frederick R. Wiseman Museum in Minneapolis, the "exploding silver artichoke"[6] that is a highly metaphoric building of emergent, organic forms and industrial forces. Gehry is also known as an important sculptor. Identifying herself with him, O'Connell would "love to design the shapes of buildings," and even when she is "making little pieces" she thinks, "this could easily be a big building."[7] For O'Connell there may be no distinction between architecture and large-scale sculpture; both may be metaphors of the enclosing body in dynamic relation to exterior space and to the land.

For O'Connell both architecture and sculpture bridge the inside, where one is "trapped" behind a taut, resistant skin, and the outside, where grand opportunities for interaction with the environment, where an ideal freedom, nourishment and knowledge are possible. "That's why I'm interested in outside spaces," O'Connell says,[8] and that is why she finds the "sculptural experience" one that focuses on the power of space as much as the object itself.[9] The interactive character of this sculptural experience may disguise political interaction; it certainly expresses psychological interaction.[10]

The form of O'Connell's public monuments commands and enlivens space as it speaks to the environs. The small personal sculptures truly coalesce aspects of the female body with both organic and industrial forms, and in a manner that we recognize; they seem intimate and familiar. Their charged inwardness makes them seem like fetishes, and they are, if we



FIG. 11
Sheela-na-gig
Ireland, c. 1080 A.D.
stone
Courtesy of the National Museum of Ireland, Dublin



FIG. 12
Eilis O'Connell
Hot with Inward Heat
Bath, 1990
Photo courtesy of Green on Red Gallery, Dublin, and the Artist

define fetish as an object possessing hidden powers that symbolically organize the self, and magically enhance security. "There's one part of my body that I love, and that's my small toe, which has an edge to it from having to walk on the floor. We create the environment and the environment shapes us."[11] So, a shaping interaction with the world works in smaller scale as well, where a revered body part can inspire form. Was it the edge of her toe that inspired *In the Roundness of Being* (no. 41) The curve is similar to a toe's edge, but the sculpture is much longer, and more powerfully suggests the neck, shoulder and arm. This body fragment, like a fretful ghost, appears to push against the sculpture's surface. The work resembles aquatic flipper, angel wing and kitchen carving knife as well; fused organic forms terminate in dangerous, machine-tooled elegance. As a knife, the sculpture embodies the process that produced it because it was carved from polystyrene, and later cast. O'Connell likes the "different kind of feeling" carving produces. It's "much more about the body when you carve. Your body creeps into it because you're using the movement of your body to take out," to remove material.[12]

Under the Precipice (no. 44) plays on the humor of merging female body parts with industrial forms. Poised at the top of a rectangular, rusted-steel plate are two sharp, rusted steel cones joined together and pointing threateningly downward. These geometric breasts might impale us, squirming beneath. The sculpture, composed of the simplest of industrial parts that have been altered by a process of nature, conjures some snaggle-toothed medieval torture chamber, or twin, monstrous faces joined and watchful. The chimney posts atop Antoni Gaudi's *Casa Mila* evoke militant medieval figures, and O'Connell, attuned to architectural form, may also have been thinking of them. Somehow she makes all these allusions female, intending, perhaps, a send-up of

militancy and humorlessness sometimes found in women's issues.

Entrapment inside and freedom outside is as much a theme for the small "personal" sculptures as it is for the public work. Two rusted steel squares entrap two symmetrical, breast-like gourds whose stems form nipples in *To Swell the Gourd* (no. 39, pl. XIII). *Cathoid* (no. 42, pl. XIV), a blue pubic form made of lead crystal, is opened at its center by a tear-drop shape that makes us intensely aware of its interior darkness. *Enmeshed* (no. 40), made of brass and woven brass wire, resembles a large barnacle, a basket and a breast that is perforated at the center and so made into a vagina. "I often use the vagina shape from the sheela-na-gig," O'Connell has said, but wants the vagina understood as the entrance to the womb, to an enclosed, vital space.[13]

The central portion of the three-part *Earthed* (no. 43) contains such a vertical slit that gapes, running parallel to its left, straight edge. *Earthed* is composed of three pieces of painted, patinated and rusted steel. The floor piece, about 24 inches tall, is an unfurling, organic, emergent form that casts shadows mysteriously within and along the floor. It resembles *Wrapt*, a larger birch sculpture that delimits a lit interior space; in our exhibited work the curling form is placed in an environment of sculptural elements. The slit, suggesting vagina, eye and navel, is poised just so within the central wall element, apparently made of wood and longer than the floor piece. It is bounded by right angles and an ellipse exquisitely joined to the straight edges. Above, at right, the third element, a rusted steel spike juts out from the wall. It is dangerous, yet seems the materialization of the negative space of the slit; one hastens to link presence and absence, although the sizes hardly match. One senses that these three forms have dispersed to the positions they now occupy, much as the continental shelves of the earth have drifted apart. Once, the three fit abstractly into one another, into a kind of integrated female form. The body shown fragmented is disturbing because it signals emotional fragmentation. These dispersed body parts may also register historical disruptions of the land as female and more recent political concerns about the control of women's bodies, a concern that in O'Connell's work goes unmediated by the irony found in Kathy Prendergast's watercolors.[14] In O'Connell's sculpture the psychological expression is primary; the historical and political expression secondary.



FIG. 13
Eilis O'Connell
Secret Station
1990-92
above: steam generator, day
below: fiber optic, night
patinated bronze, steel, fiber optics, steam generators.
Courtesy of Green on Red Gallery, Dublin, and Artist.
Photo: John Davies

These forms have deep and abiding resonance because O'Connell makes sculptures that refer to the integration/dispersal of the self in the domain of a widening interrelatedness with the environment and the history of the land; they embody paradox and its resolution. These refinements are found in a sensuously abstract formal language that allows us to create levels of meaning for ourselves.

Notes

1 O'Connell 1997b

2 Quoted in Hall 1993, p. 26.

3 O'Connell 1997a

4 Quoted in Hall 1993, p. 26.

5 Heaney 1969, p. 36.

6 Minneapolis 1993, p. 3.

7 Hall 1993, p. 27.

8 O'Connell 1997b. O'Connell makes a specific distinction between inside and outside, saying that with her escape to the outside she was free, was better nourished and was able "to learn things out there."

9 O'Connell 1997a

10 Both O'Connell's work and her words demonstrate that she is drawn to, and will continue to explore the creative power of interaction.

11 Hall 1993, p. 28.

12 O'Connell 1997b

13 Hall 1993, p. 29

14 For a discussion of Prendergast's watercolors see the essays by Pamela Berger and James Smith in this catalogue.

Abbreviations

Hall 1993
Hall, Charles. "The Undomesticated Space," *Eilís O'Connell*. The Gallery at John Jones, London, Dublin, 1993.

Heaney 1969
Heaney, Seamus. "The Diviner" from *Death of a Naturalist*. London and Boston, 1969

Minneapolis 1993
The Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum at the University of Minnesota. Star Tribune/ Cowles Media Co. Minneapolis, 1993.

O'Connell 1997a
O'Connell, Eilís. Interview. With Alston Conley and Mary Armstrong, January 1997.

O'Connell 1997b
O'Connell, Eilís. Conversation. With Alston Conley and Mary Armstrong, January 1997.

ANGELA BOURKE

Exploring the Darkness: Gwen O'Dowd's *Uaimh*

Uaimh,[1] in Gwen O'Dowd's recent work, is a deep vertical darkness between areas of graduated color. The paintings are astonishing, suggesting all at once the majesty of landscape, the work of human hands, and the pleasurable or painful intimacy of our bodies. When they were first shown, in Dublin's Kerlin Gallery in the spring of 1997, they were given yet another dimension by their naming, as O'Dowd's choice of title invited the viewer to explore her images as reflexes of traditional stories told in Irish.

Using the Irish language in a metropolitan setting, as O'Dowd did in Dublin, is a particular kind of code in Ireland at the end of the twentieth century. Familiar on signposts and in government publications, and compulsory in schools, Irish was deeply unfashionable for many years. Like Russian in Hungary, not knowing it was a sign of independence and sophistication; but things have changed. People are rediscovering the Irish language, attending classes in unprecedented numbers. Irish words used in everyday, international, English are code for a code: They mark the way to unpaved places, to a world of stories, to memories both disturbing and liberating, as their semantic contours are presented as larger and more fluid than those of the English words used to translate them. Stories about places called *uaimh* deal with what is seen and what is hidden. Ostensibly about landscape and community, they are also about imagination, and often about bodies, specifically women's bodies.

Uaimh can mean a natural cave, or the mouth of a tunnel or souterrain; it can be a hollow where water has collected, or even a grave. In the legends of manuscript and oral tradition, it affords access to everything that lies beneath the surface of what is seen: beyond it are the pagan Otherworld and the Christian Hell, and what we now call the unconscious. Treasure may lie buried there, awaiting someone brave enough to enter. *Uaimh* is a common noun, not a specific placename. These images may have begun as representation of real caverns on the coast of north Mayo, but their significance now is wider, inviting contemplation of all cave-like openings.

Uaimh Phádraig in Ultaibh is the cave known in English as Saint Patrick's Purgatory, on Station Island, Lough Derg, County Donegal. Now perhaps best known through the poetry of Seamus Heaney, in the middle ages it was an Irish *Inferno*—an entrance to Hell, where pilgrims were shut in for twenty-four hours at a time to experience for themselves the torments of Purgatory. The pilgrimage continues, arduous and uncommercialized, but the cave has long been closed up. Even before the coming of Christianity it was most probably a site of ordeals—of ritual encounters with the unknown.[2]

Uaimh Chruachan is the cave of Cruachan in Connacht, near the royal home of the legendary Medb and her husband Ailill. It never acquired a Christian pedigree and remains open: a low mouth at the foot of a slope in Rathcroghan, County Roscommon, just big enough for an adult to crawl in. Fearsome things used to come forth from the cave of Cruachan: devastating birds, cats, pigs, even werewolves, according to the twelfth-century *Acallamh na Senórach*. This text is a compendium of place-lore, framed as a dialogue between St. Patrick and the ancient heroes Oisín and Cailte. It tells of three sisters who changed into wolves and emerged from the cave of Cruachan annually to terrorize the countryside, until lured into their death

NO. 3 (P. 68)
Gwen O'Dowd
Uaimh Series
1996
mixed media on canvas/board
53 x 42 in.
Private Collection, Ireland
Courtesy of Kerlin Gallery, Dublin

by a musician: the only kind of man they trusted.[3] Other terrifying women lived there too: notably the Morrígan, loathly goddess of destruction. Yet great wonders awaited anyone who managed to enter the cave. It led to the Otherworld of vernacular narrative; the abode of the *sí*, the fairies, or the "good people."[4]

Medieval stories of heroes who ventured into the body of the earth through caves are echoed in the narratives of modern folklore. In legends still told in rural Ireland, men make their way through mysterious openings: caves, rock-clefts or magical doorways in fairy forts—places well known, but usually avoided—and find a timeless existence among the "good people." Men who go innocently, and at appropriate times, are rewarded with gifts of music or money, or with the love of women; indeed many are lured away from normal life by fairy women. Others, whose approach is violent, or who cause damage, find themselves punished: one who cut a stick from a tree growing in a fairy fort later lost the use of his arm; a young man who ripped the roof off a fairy dwelling by cutting heather on a hillside was punished when the fairies abducted his sister and later crippled her by piercing her leg with a long thorn.[5] Injuries to the fairy places of the earth's landscape are revenged with injuries to the human body, underlining a persistent analogy between the two.

One kind of cavern, in several different parts of Ireland, is called Poulnashantona (*Poll na Seantuinne*). Máire Mac Neill has argued that this name may well mean "the hag's hole." She suggests that the hag in question is no ordinary old woman, but a mythological being, and that the places so-named may once have been understood as entrances to Hell.[6] Several places on the north Mayo coast, where O'Dowd's images originate, are called Poulnashantona. They are blow-holes or puffing-holes: places where the force of the sea crashing into a cave has caused its roof to fall in, leaving a yawning hole in the ground above. Sea-spray plumes up through these blow-holes in rough weather; people have fallen into them and drowned in the deep water below.

The *Uaimh* paintings fall into two groups. In some works the mysterious darkness at the center is curved and inviting (nos. 1, 2, pl. I, fig. 14) in others, straight-sided, hard-angled, vertiginous, seeming to open at the feet of the viewer (no. 3, fig. 15). The first may be the sea-caves; the second, the corresponding holes in the ground above, but it is hard not to have a sense that, as in the stories, the former are sanctioned doorways—

natural openings, like bodily orifices—the latter, gashes made by digging, cutting or collapse: wounds.

A light-colored foreground which appears in the curved forms (nos. 1, 2, pl. I, fig. 14) could be read as the sea, as though the viewer approached a sea-cave by boat, but it also persuasively suggests a floor a firm surface on which to walk forward and in. This might represent Newgrange (*Brú na Bóinne* in Irish), a famous archaeological site whose sexual resonances Irish-language poet Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill celebrates in "Feis."[7] Newgrange is a prehistoric burial mound in the valley of the Boyne, its doorway flanked by decorated stones, where, at the winter solstice, the sun penetrates the full length of a dark passage to the innermost chamber, and where medieval storytellers located the abode of the pre-Christian gods, the *sí*. Alternatively, these curved forms could be huge jars, taller than we are, like the ones which hid Ali Baba's forty thieves. Their bands of burnished encaustic color suggest ceramics fired in intense heat. Either way, these images speak of safety, containment.

Where O'Dowd's forms are straight, however, instead of reassuringly horizontal stripes at hand and eye level, we find striations parallel to the darkness (no. 3, fig. 15). There is no floor, no right way up; instead we topple forward and down, or gaze up into the place

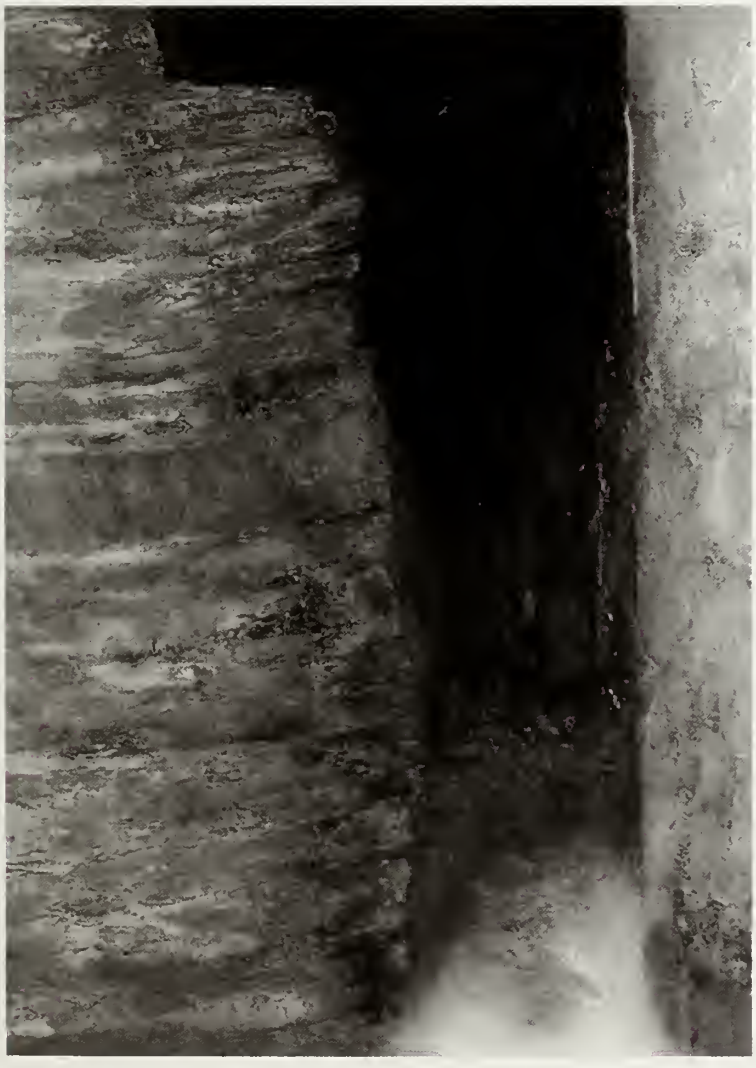


FIG. 14
Gwen O'Dowd
Uaimh Series
1996
mixed media on canvas/board
Private Collection, Ireland
Photo courtesy of Kerlin Gallery, Dublin, and the Artist

from which we have been dropped. It may be a grave, an archaeologist's excavation, a turf-cutting, or a hole where the land has suddenly fallen away; or perhaps it is a vulva, and we have just been born. There is nothing gentle about the openings in these images.

Máire Mac Neill's monumental *Festival of Lughnasa* contains many stories of entry to the Otherworld through caves and holes in the ground.[8] One of them, recorded in County Limerick in 1940, says of a hole called *Poll na Bruighne*, that "the fairies used to come out of the hill through that hole. They used to say that if you threw a stone or a ball of thread into the hole it would be thrown out again, and if there was blood on it when it was thrown out you would die before long."[9] Another legend, told of Meelin's Rock, Duhallow, County Cork, concerns "a natural recess in a steep cliff in a wooded grove by the river Dalua."[10] A girl called Maoilin (anglicized Meelin), fled to this place from her father's house rather than marry the man he had chosen for her. One account states that a fairy lover bore her away, but in any case, the rock opened to admit her. Later a drunken carpenter broke off the piece of rock that still bore the mark of her hand, and tradition says his own hand withered immediately.

Anthropologist Mary Douglas has argued that the human body is always a metaphor for the body of society, and that particularly in oral culture, people "use their own bodies as symbolic analogs for thinking about society and the universe."[11] As this essay has tried to show, the landscape too provides structures to think with: outside and inside; male and female; known and unknown. Its surface is not continuous or sealed, but penetrable, and marked by wounds as well as by orifices. Access to its secret places is easy for the initiated; dangerous and frightening for others. Painting the anatomy of landscapes, seen or seen through, Gwen O'Dowd conveys poetic ideas also found in Irish legends of the Otherworld. Some of the places she represents are like those spots marked by stories, where an intractable rock-face could open wide enough to admit a horse with rider and pillion, when a human midwife was needed to deliver a fairy child, and could close again behind her when she left.[12] Other places, other images, are horrifying reminders of violence.



FIG. 15
Gwen O'Dowd
Uaimh Series
1996
mixed media on canvas/board
Private Collection, Ireland
Photo courtesy of Kerlin Gallery, Dublin, and the Artist

Notes

I am grateful to Gwen O'Dowd and to my colleague, Coaimhín Mac Giolla Leith, author of the catalogue essay for the *Uaimh* exhibition, for valuable discussions. I am of course solely responsible for the ideas and interpretations expressed here.

1 Pronounced 'oo-wev.

2 For a good overview of the history and continuing importance of St. Patrick's Purgatory, see Hopkin 1989.

3 Jackson 1951, pp. 162-64 (no. 136); Stokes and Windisch 1900, pp. 214-16.

4 See, for instance, Rees and Rees 1961, pp. 298-305.

5 Bourke 1993 and Bourke forthcoming.

6 Mac Neill 1971-73, p. 206-11.

7 Translated by Paul Muldoon as "Carnival" in Ní Dhomhnaill and Muldoon 1992, pp. 10-19.

8 Mac Neill 1982.

9 Ibid. p. 678.

10 Ibid. p. 210.

11 Douglas 1970, p. 72. See also Chapter 5.

12 Ó hEochaidh, Mac Neill & Ó Catháin 1977, pp. 60-65, nos. 14-16.

Abbreviations

Bourke 1993
Bourke, Angela. "Fairies and Anorexia: Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill's 'Amazing Grass'," in *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium XIII* (1993), pp. 25-38.

Bourke forthcoming
Bourke, Angela. "Language, Stories, Healing," in *Gender and Sexuality in Modern Ireland*. Ed. Anthony Bradley and Maryann Valiulis. Boston, forthcoming.

Douglas 1970
Douglas, Mary. *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology*. Harmondsworth, 1970.

Hopkin 1989
Hopkin, Alannah. *The Living Legend of Saint Patrick*. London, 1989.

Jackson 1951
Jackson, Kenneth. *A Celtic Miscellany*. Harmondsworth, 1951.

Mac Neill 1971-73
Mac Neill, Máire. "Poll na Seantuinne and Poll Tighe Liabáin," *Béaloideas* 39-41 (1971-73), pp. 206-11.

Mac Neill 1982
Mac Neill, Máire. *The Festival of Lughnasa: a Study of the Survival of the Celtic Festival of the Beginning of the Harvest*. Dublin, 1982 [Oxford, 1962].

Ní Dhomhnaill and Muldoon 1992
Ni Dhomhnaill, Nuala and Muldoon, Paul. *The Astrakhan Cloak*. Wake Forest, 1992.

Ó hEochaidh, Mac Neill and Ó Catháin 1977
Ó hEochaidh, Seán, Mac Neill, Máire and Ó Catháin, Séamas. *Síscéalta ó Thír Chonaill/ Fairy Legends from Donegal*. Dublin, 1997.

Rees and Rees 1961
Rees, Alwyn and Brinley Rees. *Celtic Heritage: Ancient Tradition in Ireland and Wales*. London, 1961.

Stokes and Windisch 1900
Stokes, Whitley H. and Windisch, Ernst. Irische Texte IV (1) Leipzig, 1900.



ROBERT SAVAGE

Strongholds and *Relics*: Images of "the Troubles"

Over the past twenty-eight years, Northern Ireland has been traumatized by "the Troubles," the unrelenting political violence that has claimed over three thousand lives in the contentious province. Since 1969, the Irish Republican Army has waged an unsuccessful and vicious guerrilla campaign intended to force the British government to withdraw from the province that remains part of the United Kingdom. The British Army, too, has experienced little success in its attempts to defeat the I.R.A., despite the introduction of controversial authoritarian measures intended to crush the organization. In addition, Loyalist para-militaries have resorted to terrorist tactics against the I.R.A., and have further complicated the already tumultuous situation. Irish society is deeply scarred by this ensuing political and military stalemate, and especially Northern Ireland, where a debilitating sense of fear and mistrust complicates efforts to find a solution to "the Troubles."

Irish artists have responded to the "the Troubles" by appropriating and reinterpreting the architecture and the artifacts of their contested landscape. In the exhibition *Re/Dressing Cathleen*, two artists, Geraldine O'Reilly and Deirdre O'Connell, focus on this landscape and seek to reclaim and redefine symbols from Ireland's past. The innumerable casualties of "the Troubles," south Ulster and the borderland—the Island's liminal territories—are the focus of O'Reilly's recent etchings from her 1994 *Land Marks Series* (nos. 8, 14), while O'Connell, through her sculpture, *Point of Observation* (no. 6), and drawings, *Repository II* (no. 7, pl. III), recontextualizes the fortifications associated with a romanticized Irish landscape.

Castles, keeps, fortresses, and strongholds are ubiquitous in Ireland and appear frequently in the landscape of south Ulster. Many of the structures date to the Norman conquest of the twelfth century, while others were built as late as the nineteenth century. To the casual observer, the impressive stone buildings that stand alone on the magnificently scenic horizon complement the rolling hills that one associates with the Irish landscape. O'Reilly's interest in South Ulster's landscape and its strongholds extends to another structure familiar to the Irish landscape: what the Irish term "outhouses" (fig. 16). These sheds once served as modest homes for the small farmers—members of bustling agricultural communities that, long ago, succumbed to the forces of modernization. Today, many of these outhouses are used by farmers for storage or as shelter for their animals. However, along the border counties between the Irish Republic and Northern Ireland, many of these old sheds have been used by the I.R.A. to store weapons.

The south Ulster counties of Armagh, Fermanagh, Tyrone, Cavan and Monaghan (fig. 17) lie along the border that separates the Irish Republic from Northern Ireland. The 1920 Government of Ireland Act created the border that divides the island. The act was passed by the British Parliament and accepted by the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921, which established the nominally independent Irish Free State. The treaty ended the Irish War of Independence and initiated a short, but brutal, civil war. The new Irish government argued that the treaty it accepted could be used as a stepping stone towards complete independence. Opponents of the treaty insisted that those who came to terms with the British betrayed the revolution. They believed that the war against Britain would not end until Ireland was united as a sovereign republic. The civil war was a traumatic conflict that pitted friend against friend,

and family against family, and still resonates in the contemporary political structures of the Irish Republic.[1]

The border also defined the six county state of Northern Ireland that remained part of the United Kingdom. The northern state embraced only six of the nine counties traditionally designated as the province of Ulster. The remaining counties of Monaghan, Cavan and Donegal were excluded from the northern state because these counties simply contained too many Catholics. Northern Ireland, therefore, was carved out of Ulster along purely sectarian lines. Ulster Unionists insisted on this division to ensure a loyal Protestant majority that would support the union with Great Britain. Therefore, when Ireland was partitioned, ancient Ulster was also partitioned.

The partition of the island was by no means easy or clean. Unionists, who were in the minority in counties Donegal, Cavan and Monaghan, believed that their leaders in Belfast had betrayed and abandoned them. Many complained bitterly that they had been set adrift to survive in a state they regarded as hostile to their interests—the fledgling Irish Free State. In the same way, two counties, Fermanagh and Tyrone, which contained significant Catholic majorities, were incorporated into Northern Ireland and excluded from becoming part of the new Irish Free State. Historian Joe Lee has addressed this aspect of partition:

The border was chosen explicitly to provide unionists with as much territory as they could safely control. Its objective was not to separate unionists and nationalists in order to enable them to live safely apart. It was instead to ensure Protestant supremacy over Catholics in even predominantly Catholic areas.[2]

The fact that counties Fermanagh and Tyrone were part of Northern Ireland created serious problems for the northern state especially when, in 1921, the respective county councils defiantly declared their allegiance to Dublin. James Craig, then the Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, moved quickly to crush this opposition by simply dissolving the two rebellious county councils. Unionists considered the refusal by many northern nationalists to recognize the authority and jurisdiction of the Belfast parliament a threat to the stability of the province. Thirty five years after partition, in 1956, the I.R.A. engaged in a futile "Border Campaign" in a failed effort to topple the northern regime. The fact that the I.R.A. launched attacks across the border, striking police barracks inside Northern Ireland before slipping back into the Irish Republic, illustrates that the border remained a place where insurgents could stage raids and successfully evade arrest. The nationalist community along the border, especially in Fermanagh and Tyrone, ignored authorities' requests for assistance. Moreover, it became apparent that the silence of the community provided the I.R.A. with the oxygen it needed to sustain itself as a guerrilla force. Even today the nationalist population residing in these counties is viewed as suspect by Unionists.

In the most recent round of "the Troubles," the border once again has proven to be, to a certain extent, "beyond the pale" of the security forces. Parts of the counties of Fermanagh, Tyrone, Armagh, Cavan and Monaghan are havens for the I.R.A., who, to this day, hide weapons and conduct military training in the area in spite of extraordinary emergency legislation enacted by governments on both sides of the border. The most infamous part of this frontier is South Armagh, known to the British Army as "Bandit Country." The army patrols this area only by helicopter because traveling the myriad country roads, even in armored vehicles, has proven to be lethal. "Bandit Country" and the "Murder Triangle" (which includes parts of counties Tyrone and Armagh) have witnessed some of the most intense violence during the past twenty-eight years of political unrest. Security forces consider the area impossible to effectively monitor due to its rugged terrain. The British Government has employed the controversial Special Air Services (SAS) which has used clandestine counter-insurgency tactics along the border with only limited success. The fact that an outlawed, guerrilla army and covert, counter-insurgency forces are active in the area enhances its notoriety. Many residents have learned to live in this extraordinary place by understanding how to navigate what Geraldine O'Reilly describes as "a whole series of complex signs, signals and symbols."[3]

It is along this violent frontier that O'Reilly has chosen to work, living intermittently in Monaghan over a ten year period. With the etching *Strongholds* (no. 8), O'Reilly presents the area's physical structures as a

NO. 14 (P. 74)
Geraldine O'Reilly
Land Marks Series
Relics
1994
etching
31 x 37 in.
Collection of the Artist, Dublin

narrative that provides a broad local and national history about the identity of the landscape, and the people who inhabit and inherit the land. The fortifications represented are not the highlights of a romantic landscape or images of bucolic scenery made famous in the postcards of John Hinde.[4] For O'Reilly, the strongholds symbolize a violent past, and they are proof of a troubled history of colonization, confiscation, repression and exploitation.

The oil stick drawings entitled *Repository II* (no. 7, pl. III) by Deirdre O'Connell also evokes architecture that is commonly associated with a powerful military presence. Replete with small, high windows that prevent access to the outside world, these fortifications announce an entrenched presence. In a similar vein, her sculpture *Point of Observation* (no. 6) depicts a heavy defensive structure isolated on a small rocky island. As has been pointed out in this catalogue, *Point of Observation* recalls the Mussenden Temple, an Anglo-Irish folly perched on the County Derry coast.[5] In the context of O'Connell's piece, the temple is another relic of an imperial past, built by a conquering power and standing today as testimony to a complex colonial legacy.

O'Reilly and O'Connell examine structures that one associates with a male military tradition. Their images might express fear of a hostile and violent world, where brutality, rape and plunder await those who venture beyond the safety of thick, protective walls. Conversely, the images could symbolize the presence of a brute physical force, an imperial military presence, intent on holding onto the land it has captured while keeping watch over a suspect native population. The strongholds are part of a warrior past that witnessed countless battles for the land that they now help define. By reclaiming the structures from a male-dominated, colonial past, O'Reilly and O'Connell challenge the traditional and romantic interpretation of the images, and place them in a more complicated historical context.

For O'Reilly, strongholds connect past and present. By reclaiming the structures, she implies that this connection must be understood from a post-colonial perspective. Although many of the fortifications date to the Norman invasion, their original, military purpose still resonates in Irish society today. Indeed, one could argue that "the Troubles"—that have haunted Ireland over the past twenty-eight years—have produced a mentality and a language that is deeply rooted in the legacy of these ancient structures. Terms such as "siege mentality" are part of a contemporary vocabulary used to describe the political psychology of Unionists in Northern Ireland, while slogans such as "No Surrender!" and "Not an Inch!" recall exclamations that may have been heard along the walls of these bastions centuries ago. Unionism identifies with gates and castles, partly because its culture celebrates the tenacity and perseverance of a people who withstood the brutal siege of Derry by James II's Catholic forces in 1689. The Protestant population that fled to Derry endured a fearful ordeal, but survived the siege behind the massive stone walls of the fortified city. By the same token, within the nationalist tradition, the term "Castle Irish" is used by self-proclaimed soldiers of destiny to disparage those nationalists who are considered weak on the "national question."

O'Reilly has also worked as a teacher in prisons and it is partly through this experience that she understands how architecture can function to confine not only physically, but mentally. O'Reilly explains that she is well aware of what she terms the "physical assault of [these] surroundings"[6]; and it is O'Reilly's understanding of mental circumscription that she applies to her representations of the south Ulster area. The artist describes coming to terms with south Ulster's landscape as having been a process of digging beneath the surface to uncover a complex history:

"It's going beyond the surface of things. Growing up one accepts things at face value until perhaps through some crisis you suddenly look at something in a completely different light. Its not what you thought it was at all. And to reading the landscape-suddenly I could read the human history of it through how it was built...defended, marked [and] divided.[7]



FIG. 16
Geraldine O'Reilly
Land Marks Series
Outhouses
1994
etching, edition of 25
Photo courtesy of the Artist, Dublin

The south Ulster landscape is also famous for the Celtic stone heads that have been unearthed over the years. Some of the more famous of these heads have been uncovered on Boa Island in County Fermanagh and in Corleck, County Cavan, the border areas that O'Reilly explores in her work. Archeologists believe that the heads date to the pagan Iron Age and Early Bronze Age, and, although these experts maintain that "the precise cultural affinities of this material are difficult to establish," many theorize that the heads are part of a Celtic warrior culture.[8] *Táin Bó Cuailnge* or *The Cattle Raid of Cooley*, the central saga of the famous Ulster cycle, provides a vivid description of Celtic society and its warrior traditions.[9] The heroes portrayed often fought in single combat to distinguish themselves as accomplished soldiers. Historian Michael Richter, who has studied and written extensively about medieval Ireland and the *Táin*, points out that such a contest "may have been sporting, but it was also to the bitter end, for the battle trophy was the head of the opponent" which the victor kept and displayed.[10] Collecting these gruesome trophies defined the hero's power and prestige. Popular legend maintains that the head was considered the repository for the soul, and by collecting the heads of their vanquished enemy the Celtic warriors would rob them of their "essence."



FIG. 17
Map of Ireland in 1911, showing partition and provincial boundaries with percentage of Protestants in each county of Ulster
From *The Treaty* ©Thames Television plc/Screen Guides 1991
Courtesy of Merlin Films Ltd., Dublin

O'Reilly's interest in this other, south Ulster visual and military tradition—the Celtic cult of the head—is reflected in the etching *Relics* (no. 14), also part of the *Land Marks Series*. Here, the artist again connects the past to the present, linking the Celtic cult of the head with what she describes as Ireland's "contemporary tribal warfare."[11] The artist was influenced by *Magill Magazine*, a popular Irish monthly published in the '80s under the editorship of Vincent Browne. The periodical earned a reputation for its aggressive investigative reporting before folding under financial difficulties. Every year of its existence, the magazine published photographs of those killed in the violence consuming Northern Ireland at the time: multiple rows and columns of police officers, soldiers, paramilitaries and civilians were featured in black and white photographs. These photos were not attractive, nor were they meant to be: they were intended as a grim reminder of the human toll exacted by "the Troubles." They resembled mug shots one might find on an American post office wall, and were strategically presented to capture the attention of the customer who might be casually browsing a magazine rack. O'Reilly recounts that collecting these images from *Magill* in a scrapbook was the genesis of *Relics*:

I'd tear the photographs out and put them in my notebook for what seemed no apparent reason until I started to work on this [*Land Marks*] exhibition. Suddenly I found the link to the past so I made a large print of all the heads I'd collected....I was attempting to place past and present side by side. The awful repetition of events.[12]

Here, O'Reilly draws a parallel between the violence of the ancient, Celtic past and the present "Troubles."

O'Reilly executes the sugarlift etchings as high contrast, black and white shapes. Devoid of modulated grays that would soften the image, the faces are simply constructed, direct caricatures, alternately innocent and menacing when viewed up close, though from a distance they seem a featureless, abstract crowd. The repeated images confront the viewer with the faces of individuals who are not easily forgotten. When taken up as a whole, the mass of faces are oppressive, provocative and haunting. *Relics* presents the viewer with an unsettling portrait of the darker side of human nature.

Today, possession of the land remains a contentious issue, and is used to justify the murder and mayhem that continues to torment south Ulster and much of Northern Ireland. The work of O'Reilly and O'Connell challenges the viewer who might chose to view Ireland superficially. By questioning indifference and romanticism—whether native or foreign—these women artists seek to reclaim and reinterpret ancient symbol and myth, maintaining that each has meaning in contemporary Irish society.

Notes

1 For a comprehensive history of Ulster see Bardon 1993.

2 Lee 1989.

3 See Monagan 1994.

4 John Hinde produced postcards that idealized the Irish countryside and Irish cities in the 1960s and '70s.

5 See the essay by Adele Dalsimer and Vera Kreilkamp in this catalogue.

6 Qtd. in Monagan 1994.

7 Ibid.

8 Kelly 1993.

9 See Pamela Berger's essay in this catalogue for further discussion of representations of the Celtic head and the *Táin*.

10 Richter 1988.

11 Qtd. in Monagan 1994.

12 Ibid.

Abbreviations

Bardon 1993
Bardon, Jonathan. *A History of Ulster*. Belfast, 1993.

Kelly 1993
Kelly, Eamon. *Early Celtic Art in Ireland*. Dublin, 1993.

Lee 1989
Lee, Joseph. *Ireland 1912-1985 Politics and Society*. Cambridge, 1989

Monagan 1994
Land Marks: Exhibition of Prints By Geraldine O'Reilly. Monogan, 1994.

Richter 1988
Richter Michael. *Medieval Ireland, The Enduring Tradition*. New York, 1988.

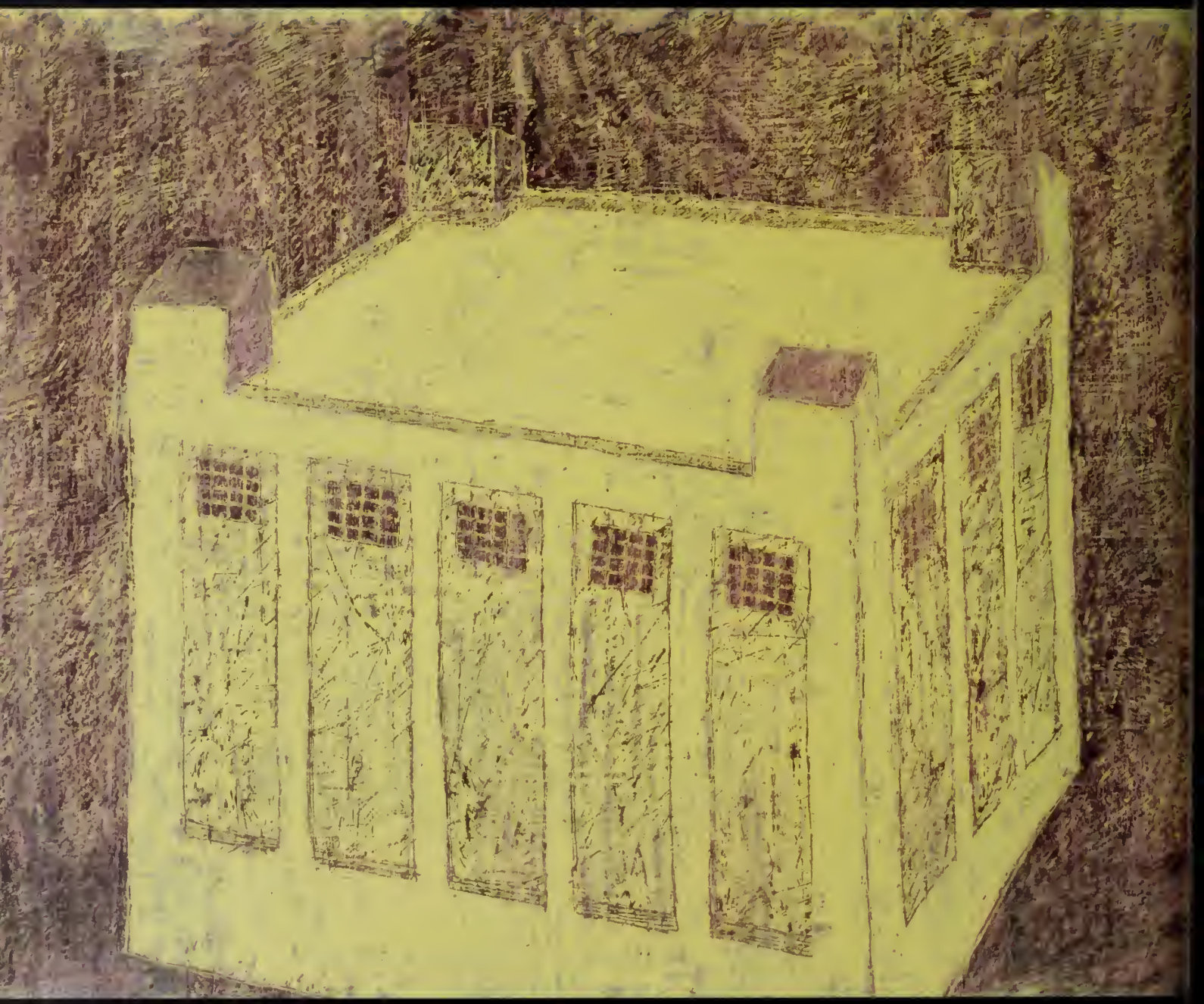


PLATE I (NO. 2)
Gwen O'Dowd
Uaimh Series
1996
mixed media on canvas/board
60 x 42 in.
Private Collection, Ireland



PLATE II (NO. 4)
Mary Lohan
Donegal Bay '97
1997
oil on board
55 x 20 in.
Courtesy of Mr. John Taylor, Taylor Galleries, Dublin





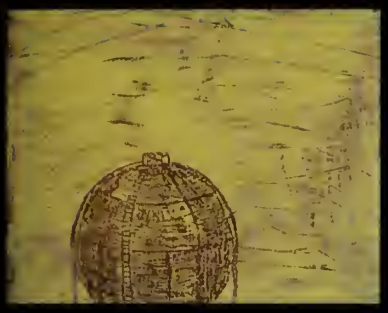








PLATE III (NO. 7)
Deirdre O'Connell
Repository II
1996
oil bar on paper
40 x 64 in.
Collection of the Artist, New York



PLATE IV (NO. 12)
Geraldine O'Reilly
Emigrant Letter Series
59 Emigrant Ships Lost
1988
acrylic, gouache, watercolor, collage, stitching
on paper
20 x 19 in.
Collection of the Artist, Dublin

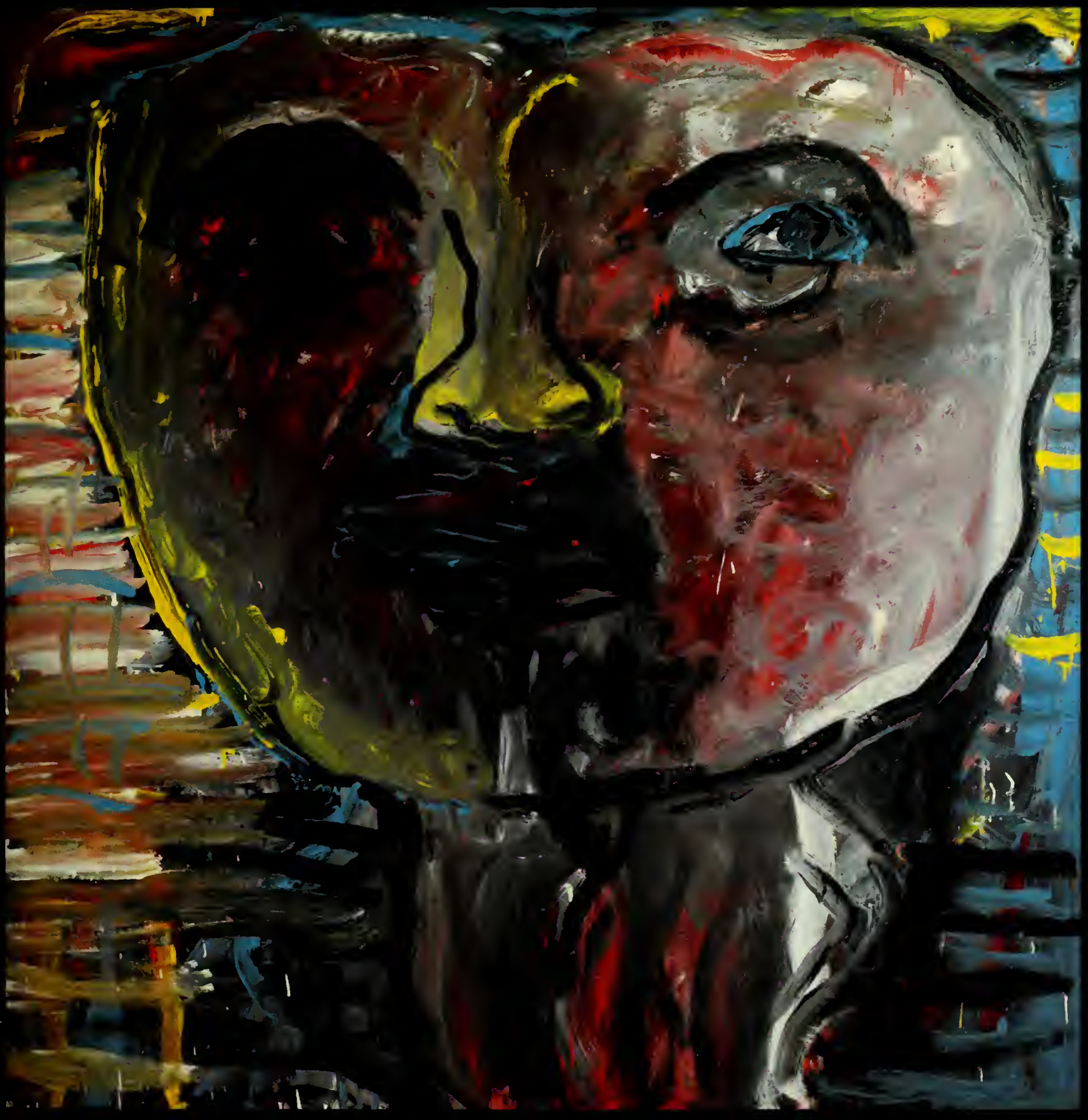


PLATE V (NO. 15)
Eithne Jordan
Split Face i
1988
oil on canvas
59 x 59 in.
Courtesy of Rubicon Gallery, Dublin



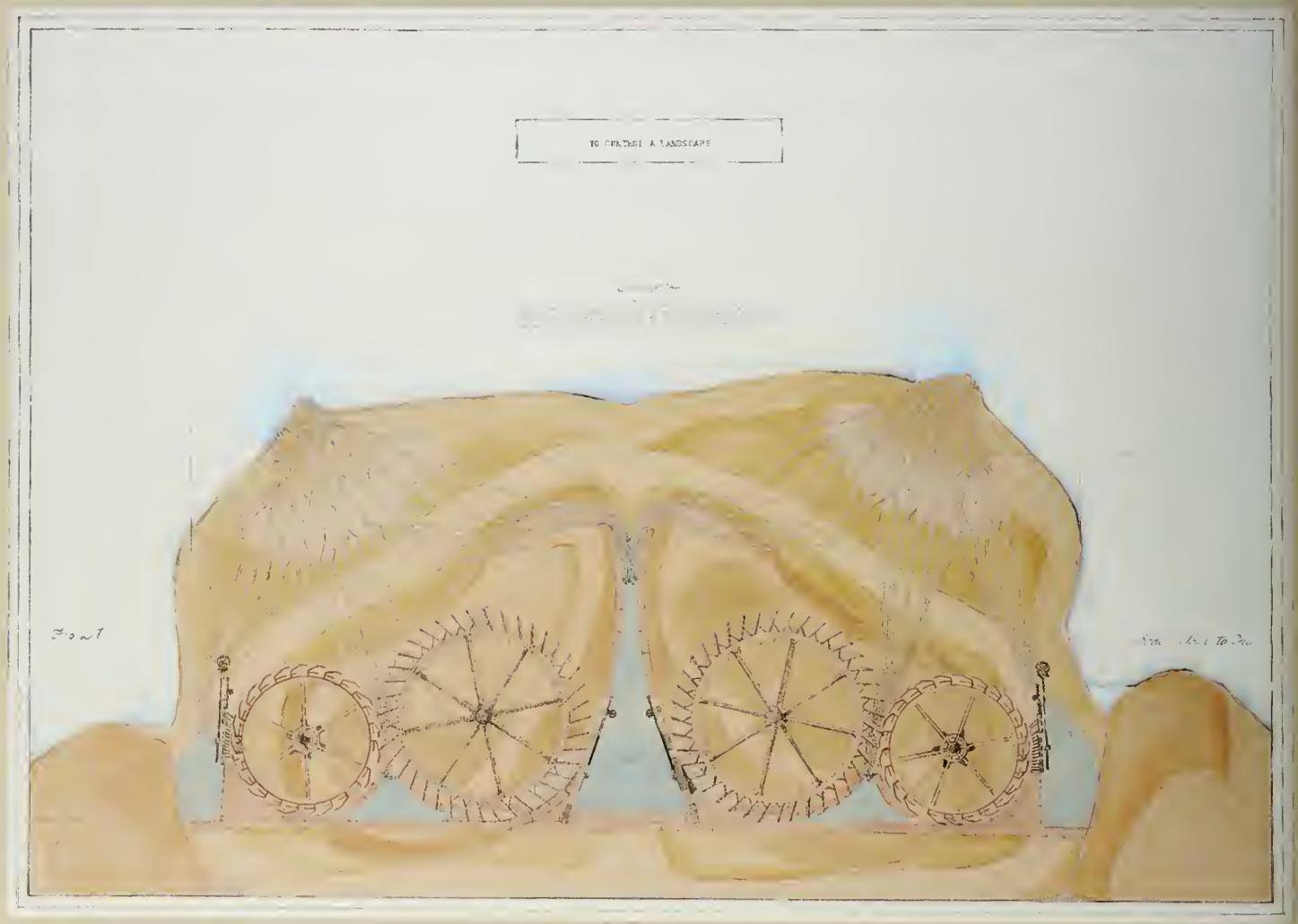
PLATE VI (NO. 17)
Rita Duffy
Journey
1994
oil on wax paper
46 x 48 in.
Collection of the Artist, Belfast

PLATE VII (NO. 20)
Rita Duffy
Scullery
1995
oil on wax paper
46 x 48 in.
Collection of the Artist, Belfast



PLATE IX (NO. 30)
Kathy Prendergast
Body Map Series
South-West Region
1983
watercolor and ink on paper
30 x 22 in.
Courtesy of the Irish Museum of Modern Art,
Dublin, Vincent and Noeleen Ferguson Donation

PLATE VIII (NO. 28)
Kathy Prendergast
Body Map Series
To Control a Landscape—Irrigation
1983
watercolor and ink on paper
14 x 24 in.
Courtesy of the Irish Museum of Modern Art,
Dublin, Vincent and Noeleen Ferguson Donation




SOUTH WEST PEGUK

PLATE XI (NO. 34)

Alice Maher

Bee Dress

1994

honey bees and cotton wire

6 x 4 x 4 in.

Collection of the Arts Coucil of Northern Ireland, Belfast



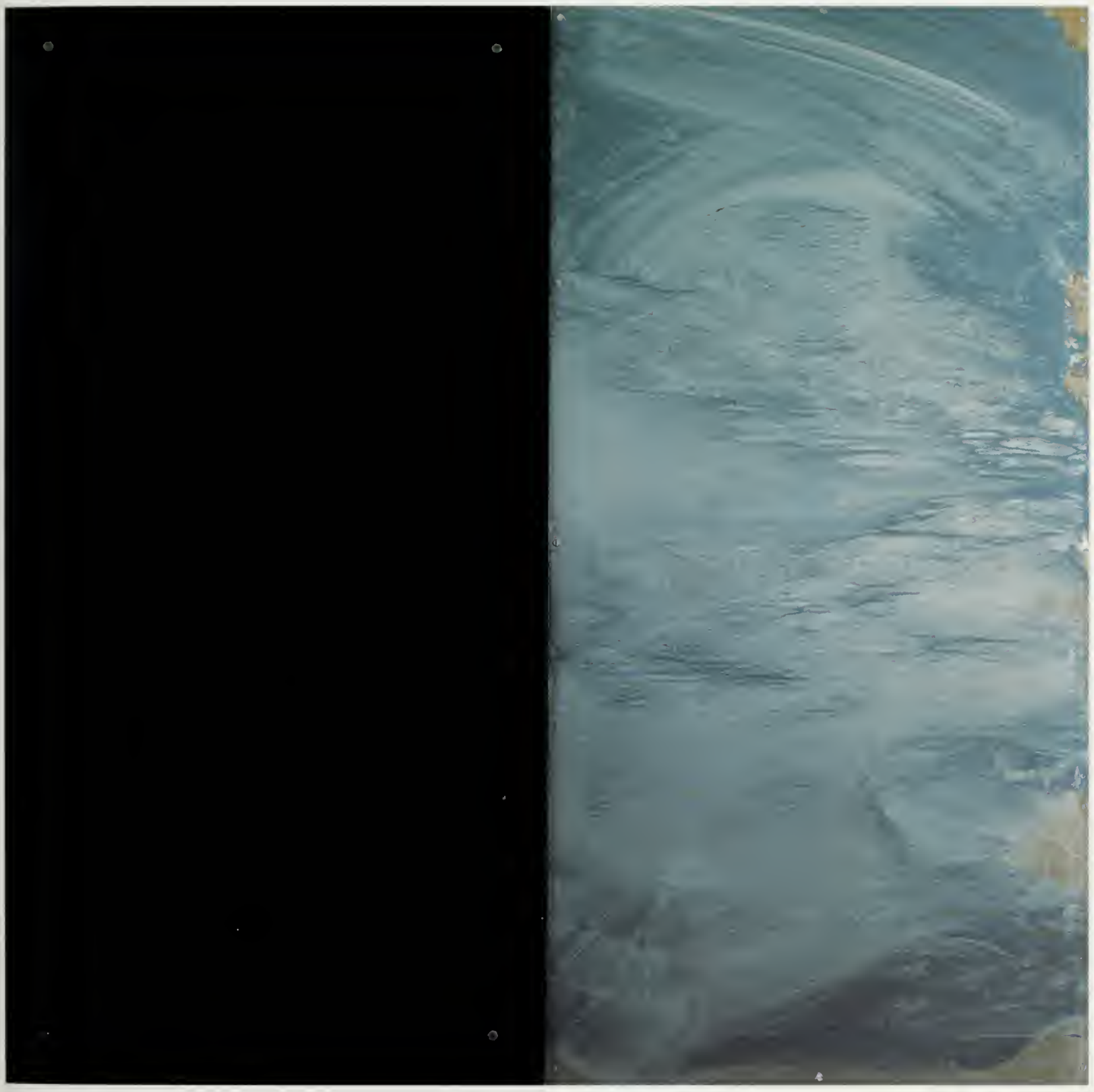


PLATE XII (NO. 35)

Mary FitzGerald

Deluge

1996

oil, on steel with velvet, glass and steel bolts

49 x 50 in.

Courtesy of Green on Red Gallery, Dublin



PLATE XIII (NO. 39)
Eilís O'Connell
To Swell the Gourd
1996
rusted steel, gourd, birch wood
(i) 12 x 24 x 3 in.
(ii) 5 x 5 x 7 in.
Courtesy of Green on Red Gallery, Dublin





PLATE XIV (NO. 42)
Eilis O'Connell
Cathoid
1996
cast lead crystal
12 x 12 x 6 in
Courtesy of Green on Red Gallery, Dublin

PLATE XV (NO. 45)
Finola Jones
[illegible] (an aesthetic view of culture)
Broadway Windows Installation, 1996-97
Wall-attached figurines
Dimensions variable
Collection of the Artist, Dublin
Courtesy of Green on Red Gallery, Dublin

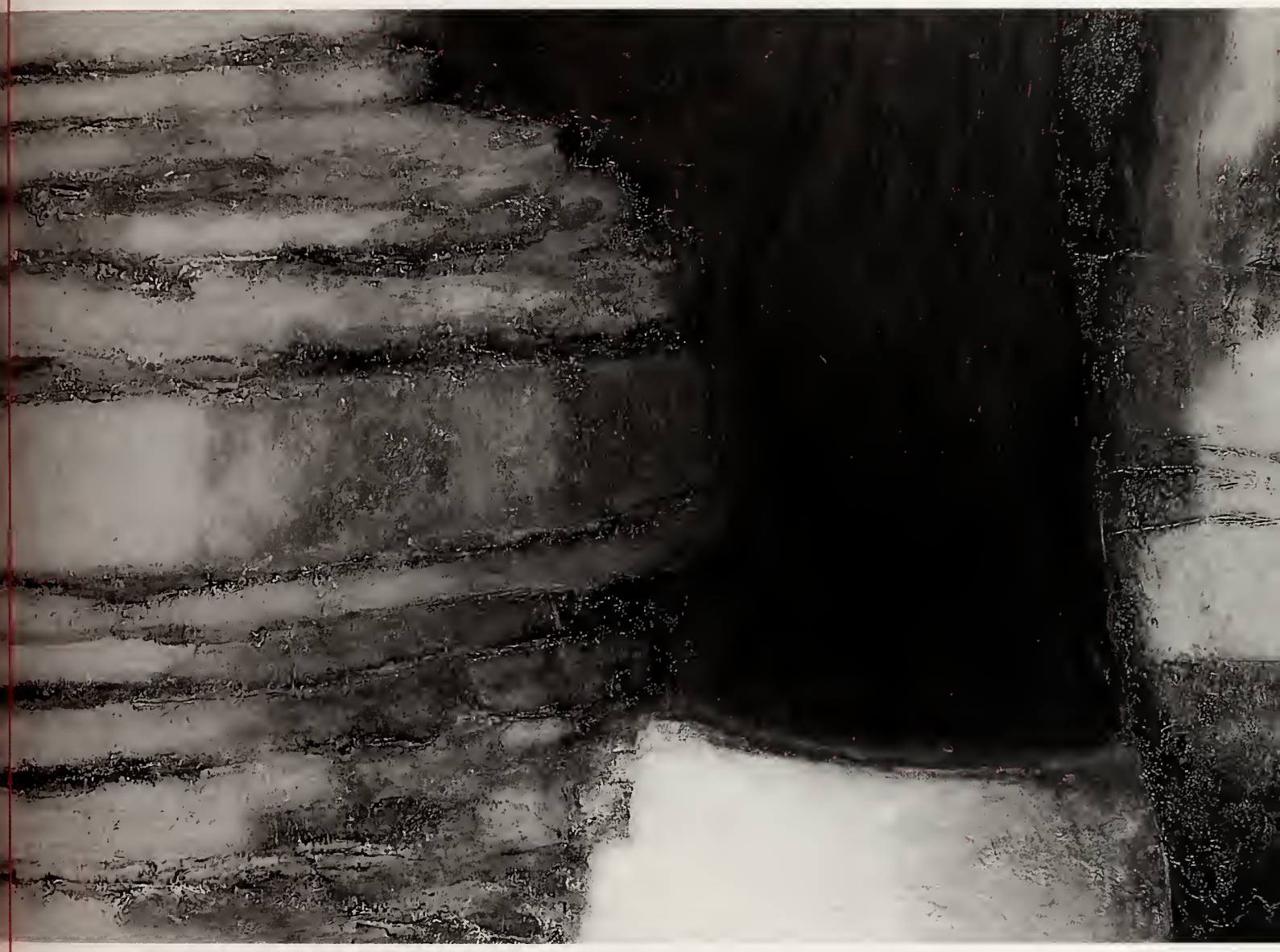




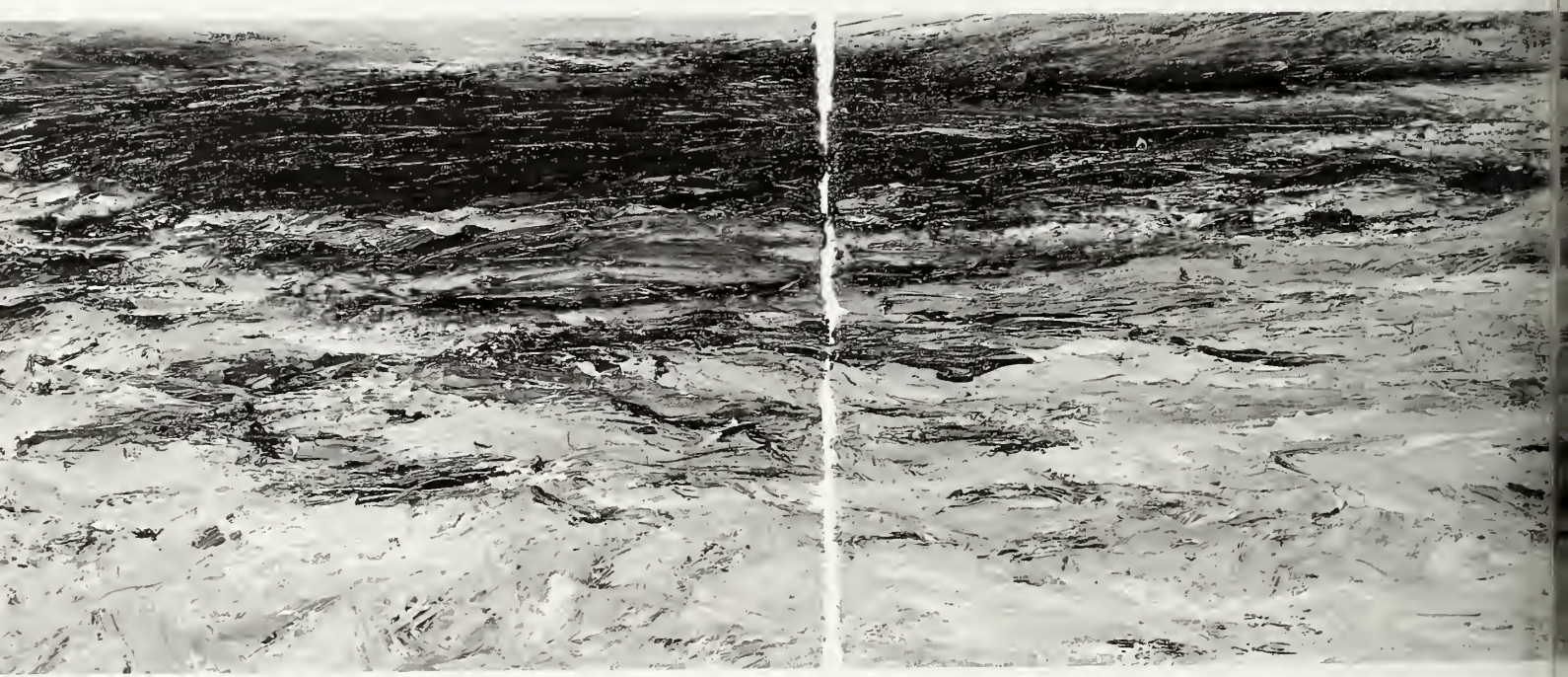
PLATE XVI (NO. 46A)
Pauline Cummins and Louise Walsh
Sounding the Depths
installation: video projection, light boxes and sound
Courtesy of the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin

PLATE XVI (NO. 46B) (FAR RIGHT)
Pauline Cummins and Louise Walsh
Sounding the Depths
Shell in Hand
Cibachrome print
Collection of the Artists, Dublin





NO. 1
Gwen O'Dowd
Uaimh Series
1996
mixed media on canvas/board
42 x 60 in.
Private Collection, Ireland
Courtesy of Kerlin Gallery, Dublin



NO. 5

Mary Lohan

Sliabh League '97

1997

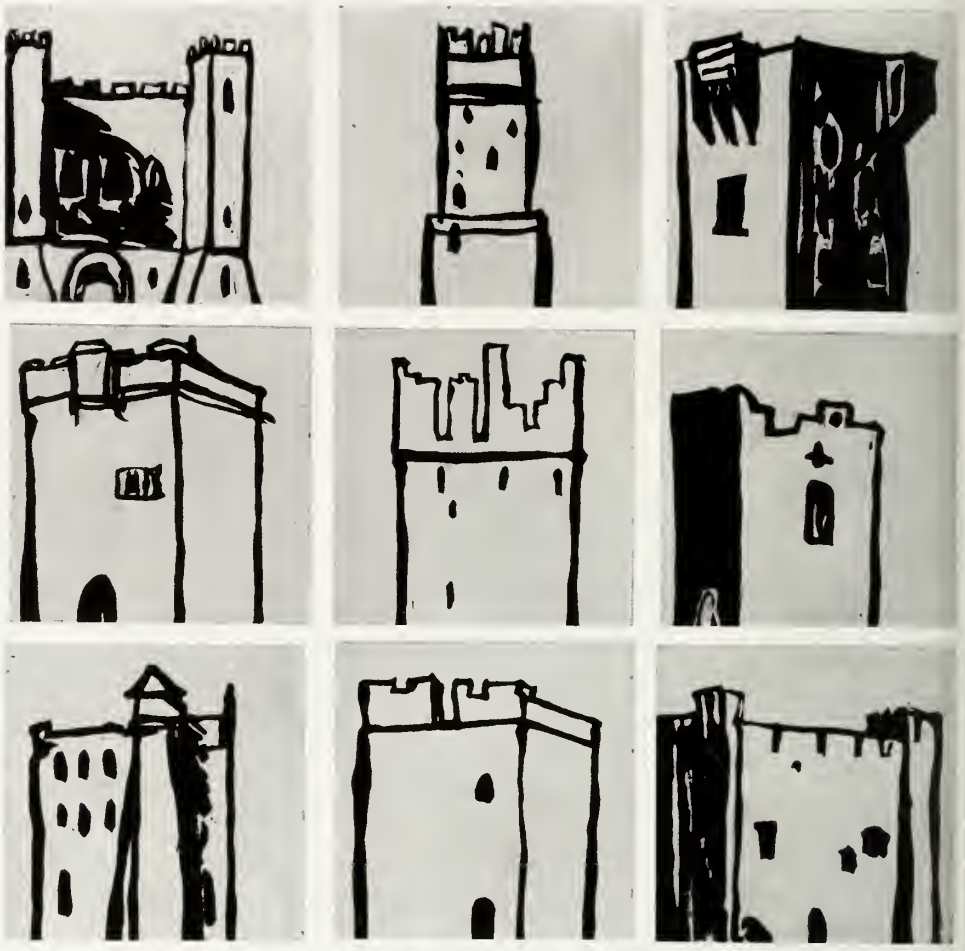
oil on board

55 x 22 in.

Courtesy of Mr. John Taylor, Taylor Galleries, Dublin



NO. 6
Deirdre O'Connell
Point of Observation
1995
plaster, rust oxide, stone
3 x 4 x 8 ft.
Collection of the Artist, New York



NO. 8
Geraldine O'Reilly
Land Marks Series
Strongholds
1994
sugar lift and aquatint etching
on Fabriano paper
39 x 27 1/2 in.
Collection of the Artist, Dublin



NO. 9
Geraldine O'Reilly
Emigrant Letter Series
Shanty and Lace
1988
acrylic, lace, collage on paper
3 x 2 ft.
Collection of Patricia Murphy, Dublin

NO. 10

Geraldine O'Reilly

Emigrant Letter Series

Emigrant's Bag

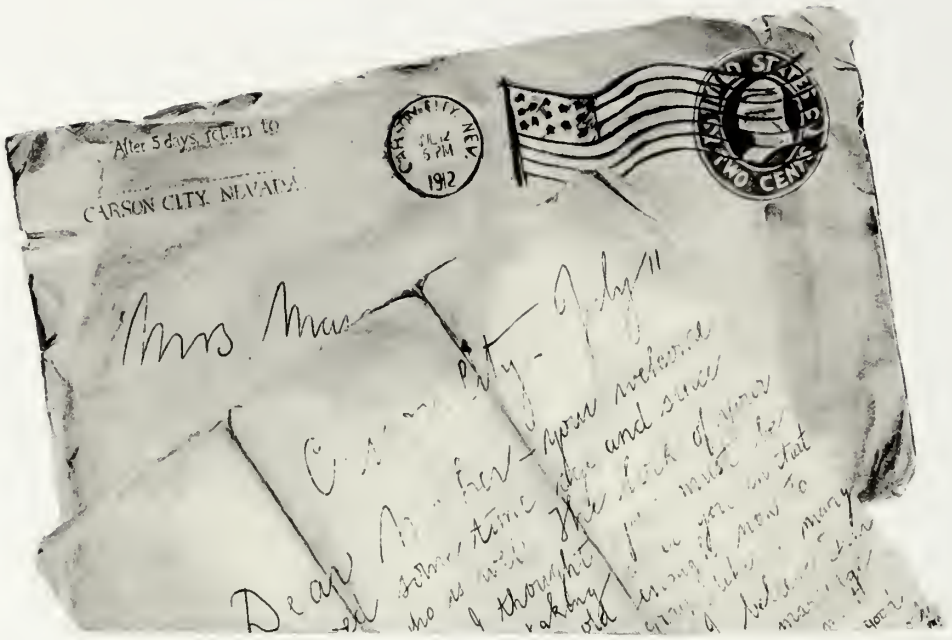
1988

collage, gouache and acrylic on paper

27 x 17 in.

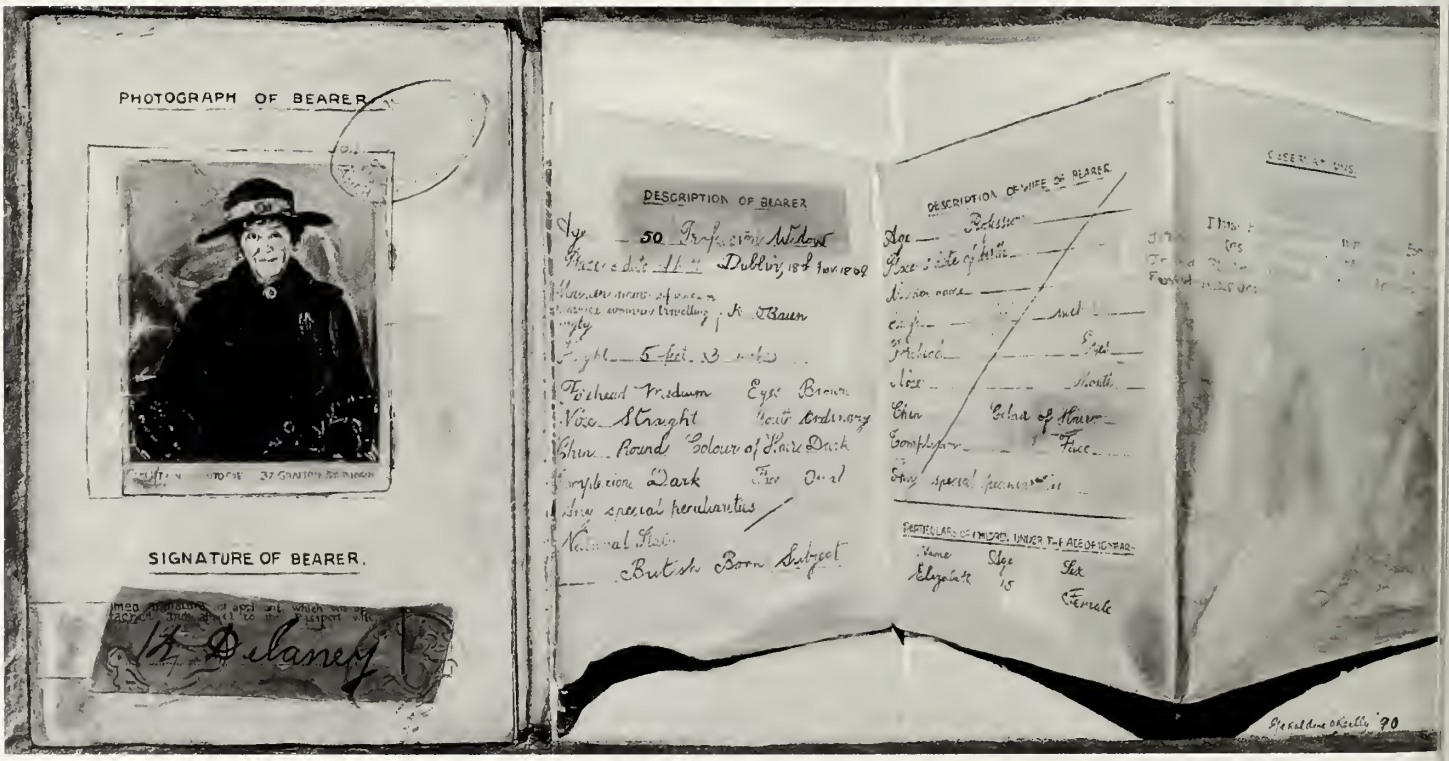
Collection of Maire and Maurice Foley, Dublin





NO. 11
Geraldine O'Reilly
Emigrant Letter Series
Emigrant's Letter and Envelope Fragment
1988
watercolor, gouache and acrylic on paper
20 x 19 in.
Collection of Justina and Peter Farrell, Dublin

NO. 13
Geraldine O'Reilly
Emigrant Letter Series
Emigrant's Passport
1988
watercolor and gouache on paper
23 x 15 in.
Collection of the Artist, Dublin





NO. 19

Rita Duffy

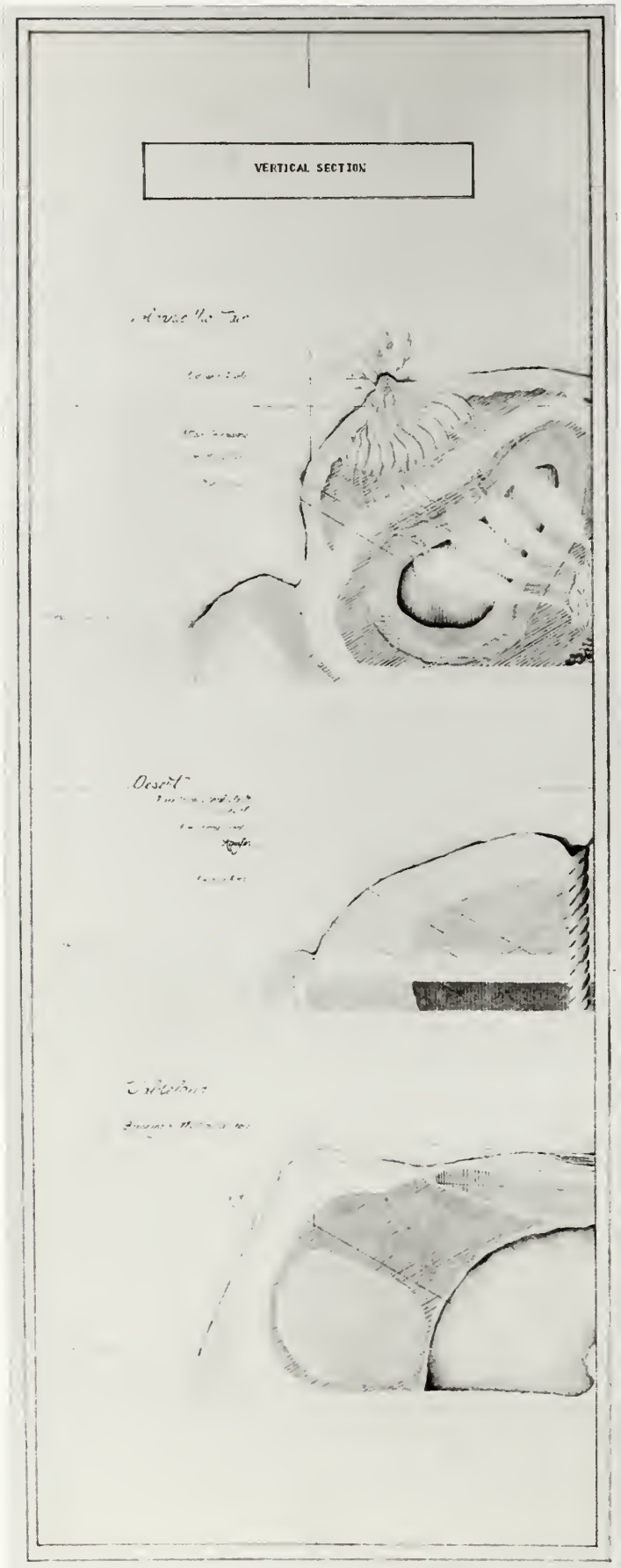
Dancer

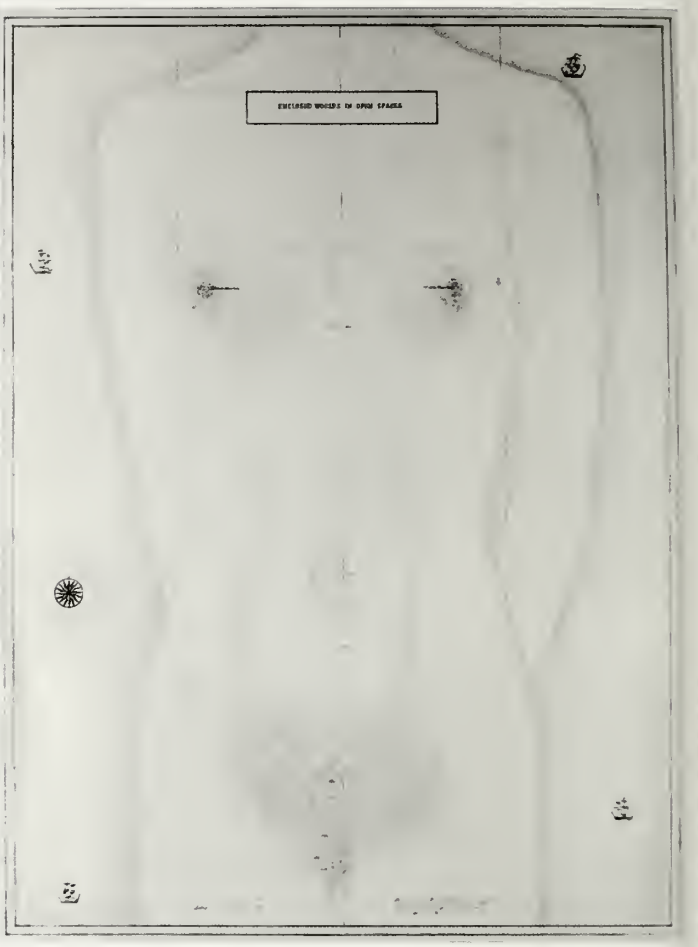
1995

oil on wax paper

46 x 48 in.

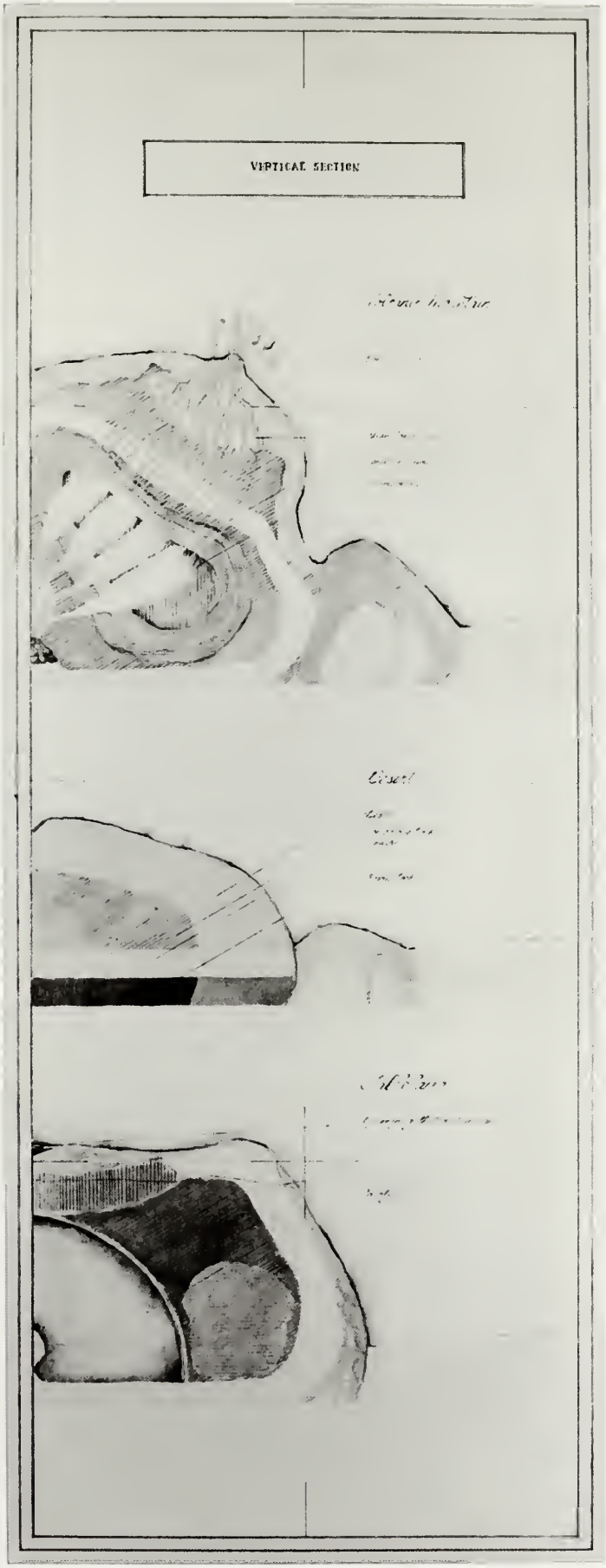
Collection of the Artist, Belfast





NO. 21
Kathy Prendergast
Body Map Series
Vertical Section
1983
watercolor and ink on paper
30 x 12 in.
Courtesy of the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, Vincent and Noeleen Ferguson Donation

NO. 22
Kathy Prendergast
Body Map Series
Enclosed Worlds in Open Space
1983
watercolor and ink on paper
30 x 22 in.
Courtesy of the Irish Museum of Modern Art,
Dublin, Vincent and Noeleen Ferguson Donation

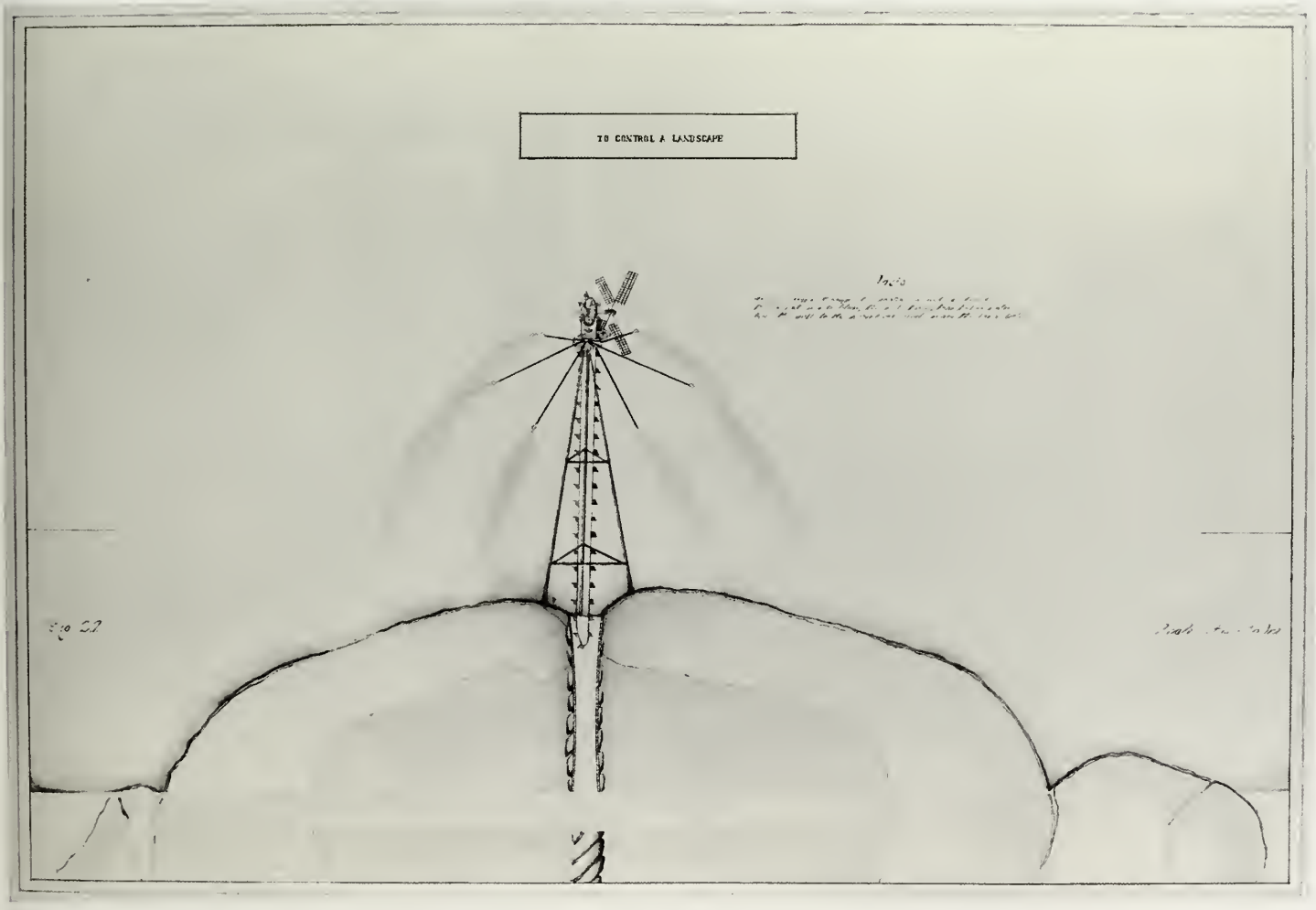


NO. 23
Kathy Prendergast
Body Map Series
Vertical Section
1983
watercolor and ink on paper
30 x 12 in.
Courtesy of the Irish Museum of Modern Art,
Dublin, Vincent and Noeleen Ferguson Donation

NO. 27
Kathy Prendergast
Body Map Series
To Control a Landscape—Tunnel
1983
watercolor and ink on paper
14 x 24 in.
Courtesy of the Irish Museum of Modern Art,
Dublin, Vincent and Noeleen Ferguson Donation



NO. 29
Kathy Prendergast
Body Map Series
To Control a Landscape—Oasis
1983
watercolor and ink on paper
14 x 24 in.
Courtesy of the Irish Museum of Modern Art,
Dublin, Vincent and Noeleen Ferguson Donation





NO. 33
Alice Maher
Thorn House
1995
wood, rose thorns and glass
6 x 4 x 4 in
Dieter and Birgit Broska Collection, Ireland



NO. 36
Mary FitzGerald
Red Sea
1994
oil on canvas with glass and graphite powder
33 x 67 in.
Collection of David Murray, Ireland



NO. 37
Mary FitzGerald
Spine
1996
velvet under glass with steel bolts and fish hooks
72 x 24 in
Courtesy of Green on Red Gallery, Dublin



NO. 38
Mary FitzGerald
Heart
1996
velvet under glass with
fish hooks, steel scalpel blades and acupuncture needles
72 x 24 in.
Courtesy of Green on Red Gallery, Dublin

NO. 40

Eilis O'Connell

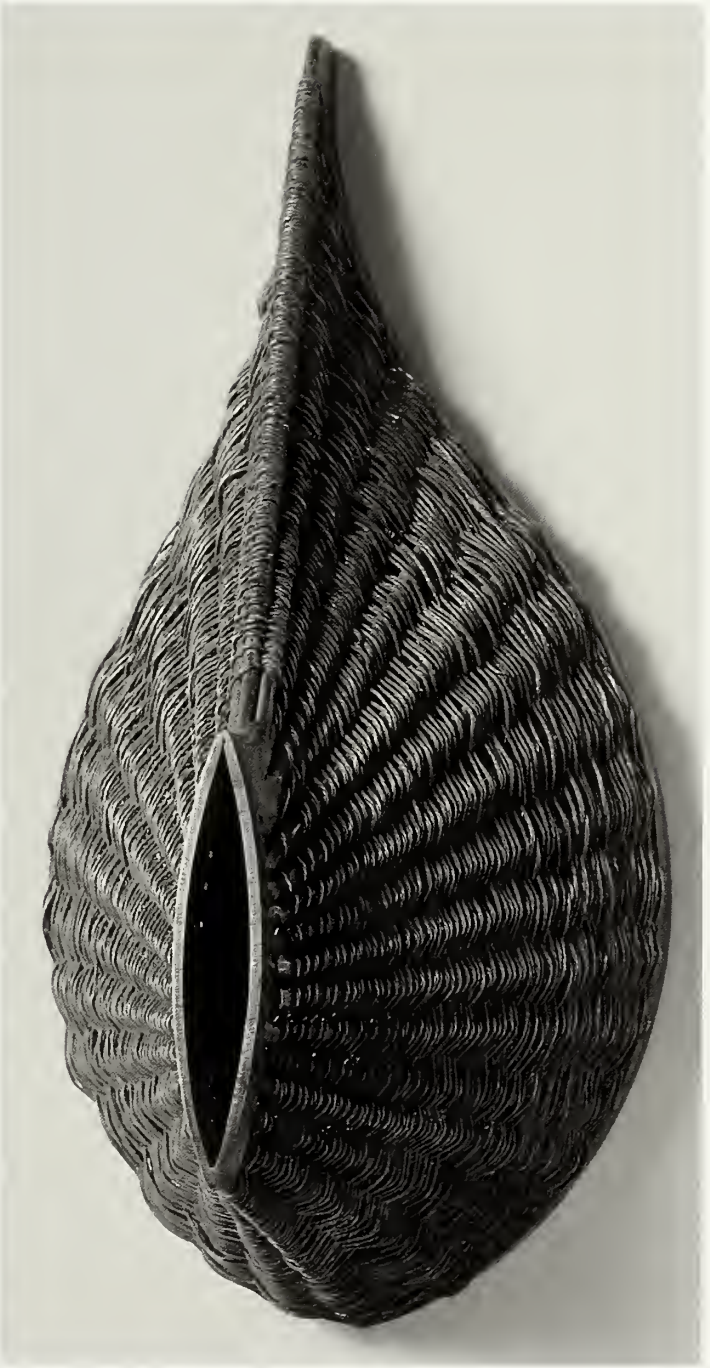
Enmeshed

1994

welded brass and woven brass wire

16 x 8 x 6 in.

Courtesy of Green on Red Gallery, Dublin





NO. 43

Eilís O'Connell

Earthed

1994

patinated, painted and rusted steel

(1) 22-1/2 x 10-1/2 x 2-3/4 in.

(2) 43 x 11 x 3 in.

(3) 22-3/4 x 7-3/4 x 2-1/2 in.

Private Collection, Ireland

Courtesy of Green on Red Gallery, Dublin

NO. 44

Eilís O'Connell

Under the Precipice

1996

rusted steel

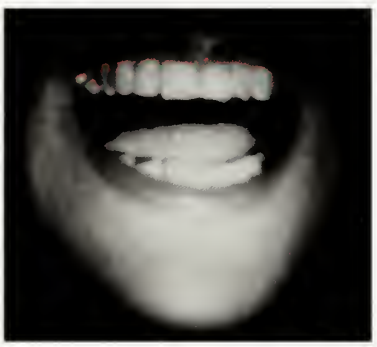
24 x 12 x 4 in.

Courtesy of Green on Red Gallery, Dublin



Interviews

An Interview with Pauline Cummins and Louise Walsh



Sounding the Depths (detail), no. 46

MA: *Sounding the Depths* (no. 46, pl. XVI) is provocative. I feel strongly that it presents us with the opportunity to educate in a spirit of open discourse. The opening question of those who are seeking to comprehend a challenging work of art is, "what is this supposed to mean?" What would you answer?

PC/LW: *Sounding the Depths* charts a journey from a position of tightness and unease to a place of self-discovery and power. That simplified reading can contain several layers of meaning, dependent on each individual's life experience. First, the video which identifies anxiety and the shocking image of the body opening. Then the second room where the still images of the completed open people exist with the sound of laughter. The work is meant to be experienced and felt. Our intention is that the narrative of the work would invoke a parallel experience within the viewer.

AC: Louise, you are quoted in the Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA) catalogue as suggesting that you are "abandoning defensive self-repression" through making this piece by "loosing the tongue, baring the teeth, stretching the lips, making sounds, beginning to talk...giving voice to the body." Your quote describes the imagery of *Sounding the Depths*. Is it a visualization of your underlying feminism?

LW: Not really. While I feel that *Sounding the Depths* is a very female work, and my work has always been informed by my feminism. It's more that the quote is about "abandoning self-repression and "loosing the tongue" about a strategy for creativity, for living, for moving forward. The female body in *Sounding the Depths* is a representation of humanity, not just femaleness but definitely made by woman artists. Therefore the angle/point of view is gendered as feminine. We have always seen that work as mainstream art practices.

MA: In your piece, you move the mouth, the locus of language, from the head to the center of the body. In what way do you intend this as a visual metaphor for the integration of mind and body? Or is it disintegration?

PC/LW: *Sounding the Depths* does not operate through a verbal language. The mouth is used as an expressive channel but not particularly as the locus of language. It is viewed as an organ that can be clamped shut; self-protective but cutting off communication. In this work the mind, body and soul are all integrated.

AC: Pauline, the body/mouth image is extremely unusual, perhaps surreal. You said that, "they can be read as sexual images—but even more they are really inner images." Can you elaborate on what you mean by inner images?

PC: We used the mouths as a visual connection between the exterior and the interior. We put it onto the belly to enable the body to "speak," and to be perceived to be open. It is a view of the body that is rarely seen, but we feel things in our bodies that cannot be easily expressed visually. These experiences of an inner life are where the work stems from, hence the term "inner images."

MA: As the woman gazes down into herself, is the idea of "the male gaze" confronted here with a sense of freedom? What replaces it?
PC/LW: As the woman gazes down into herself there is no gaze that concerns her except for her own. The "male gaze" that you speak of grazes on the surface of the body. This work is concerned with a depth that cannot be possessed by passing consumption.

AC: You also said about the piece, this "vulnerable mouth/hole in our body" not only gives "a voice to the body" but enables women "to shout, to roar with laughter, grief and joy, and finally to be whole, healed and open."[2] Do you see the artist as a shaman who heals society through their art?
PC/ LW: No. I *don't* see artists as shamans. I see artists as practitioners engaged in a particularly wide arena of cultural and visual activity. Often artists take on re-presenting and re-interpreting situations for the viewer, and themselves. In *Sounding the Depths*, we addressed a particular theme; we used the body, representation of the visceral body, to map a process. In this work we wanted people to identify through their own bodies with this experience.

MA: In what ways do you see this particular work exploring the connections between the landscape of the woman's body and the landscape contained in the island of Ireland?
PC/LW: This work does *not* connect literally with the landscape of Ireland.

AC: Pauline, you once paraphrased Virginia Woolf by saying "my body is my country."[3] Is this an outgrowth of your feminism, or of Ireland's literary projection of the nation onto women, as in "Mother Ireland"?
PC: I first paraphrased Virginia Woolf referencing "my body is my country" during an abortion referendum held in Ireland in 1983. I strongly feel that everyone's body is their own territory and that interference from church or state shouldn't be tolerated. There was a climate of repression through legislation in Ireland throughout the '80s. *Sounding the Depths* is in part a response to that attempted repression. It felt as if our bodies were being colonized, hence the wish to declare independence. It also refers to an exploration of the body as a site for constant new discoveries.

Notes

1 Roth 1992, p. 6

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

An Interview with Rita Duffy



Journey (no. 17, detail)

RD: I have used wax paper for these images. This wax paper is a by-product of a light-engineering industry. I started to draw on it with heavy crayon and then I put washes of oil paint on it. The surface tensions possible on this type of paper are terrific and facilitate the dreamlike quality of the visual landscapes.

In *Journey*, [no. 17, pl. VI], my concerns are personal. They deal with my relationship with my father. He was always an aged parent. He's 84 now, and has always filled my imagination with memories of his past, which are part of Belfast's past. His own father died fighting for the British Empire in The Somme. This was a huge contradiction for my father, a Catholic from the Nationalist area of Belfast, called The Falls Road.

When he married my mother, also a Catholic, from the South of Ireland, they went to live in Stranmillis, an aspiring Protestant working class area, and very much outside his cultural and political territory. His attitude has always been to keep your head down and work hard, and you'll get on, despite of being Catholic. Partly, because of his attitude we [his children: three girls and one boy] all worked hard to get good educations, and we now realize that my father always tried to protect us from the worst excesses of living in a divided society. He used to draw pictures for us when we were children, of gypsies and policemen. His main fear was displacement, and there was no way for him to fight the system, so he had to be careful.

His national identity and religion blurred somewhere —it was almost like his identity was his religion. I'm very interested in the whole idea of post-colonial experience, in the idea of a kind of cross-cultural sense of fractured identity. I was twelve years old before I realized the significance of Belfast on the world political stage.

MA: So what is happening with you in *Journey*?
RD: I am in a car with my father. He is sitting and I am standing: [I am] in control somehow. The piece is about

learning to manipulate as well and there's a playful element as well. It's part of a series really. For example, I'd like to show you my most recent work *Awakening Triptych* [fig. 18]. It deals with my relationship with my mother. These [gesturing to the drawings] deal with puberty and are quite intense in terms of that particular period in my life.

MA: What is the significance of the eels?
RD: The eels started to come into these drawings because of the "journeying" motif. Each year, these eels traverse the oceans of the world from the Sargasso Sea to the River Bann in Northern Ireland in order to spawn. It's like a kind of ritual, invested with a sexual mysticism. Ireland is the only place in the world where the eels travel along this dark water. Perhaps it's a kind of metaphor for me; a way of visually representing how the Irish deal with issues of sexuality; often in dark furtive ways. You can see how all of this is bound up in my own confusion about issues of Catholicism and identity.

AC: They're very dark, powerful drawings.
RD: This figure here is Thomas Aquinas [fig. 18]. It's about the Irish fear of Intellectualism, and of the way we as children were held in thrall to these dreamlike figures, and scared into religious and theological obedience by our teachers, nuns, and priests.

AC: Well, Boston College is a Jesuit college.
RD: [laughter] Good, that should prove interesting!

As a figurative artist, I used to work a lot from photographic representations of images. But you end up going back to the studio and just regurgitating images that are already extant. I now use my notebooks in a very intense way; I usually have a very fleeting moment to catch something. This happened with *The Shoe Piece* for my current show, and I hope the shoes have that kind of ephemeral quality. I usually have a very strong sense of how these images should be drawn, and how they should evolve. I like to try to actively encourage my subconscious.

AC: You are not doing preliminary drawing? You are just drawing?
RD: I draw away for a day and I am absolutely exhausted, and next day go in and think that's crap and put it away, or maybe turn it upside down and rework it. That's how the most recent show got its title [*Palimpsest*], after a lot of fiddling around. Sometimes I don't really like a piece of work at the beginning, but often, when I start fiddling around with them, they start to work and it's like one big long epic.

AC: It's really an epic of childhood.
RD: People have looked at *Scullery* [no. 20, pl. VII] and read it as a sort of abortion thing because of the incinerator. In *Scullery*, I am reimaging my mother's kitchen, which had tongs hanging on the wall. This image connected with the essential brutality of forceps delivery and the idea of an innocent child being born into a torturous world. The piece is also about my mother's twin-tub washing machine. To have a twin-tub washing machine in the late fifties and early sixties was incredible in terms of the drudgery it saved [my mother] on a daily basis. This was the era of hand-washing after all. It was a real liberation for her. William Orpen's painting, *The Washer-Woman*, always reminds me of my mother. Strangely, it has become confused in my mind with a romantic or idealized image of a woman working. I remember coming home from school, the place smelling of soap, and my mother moving the twin-tub out—everything was steaming and damp. In a strange way, all the confused love and often helplessness I felt towards my mother seems to coalesce in this domestic image.

AC: What is going on in this painting with the girl and the flying figurines?
RD: *Dancer*, [no. 19] essentially, is about me learning to dance the Irish reels and so forth. Obviously the whole idea of Irish Dancing has changed since *Riverdance*, but when I made this image I was thinking of the way I learned as a child; how everything was invested in religious significance and nationalism; how learning



FIG. 18
Rita Duffy
Awakening (triptych)
1996
charcoal on paper
Courtesy of the Artist, Belfast

to do Irish dancing was a way of expressing "Irishness," or uniqueness, or distinction from Britain. I imagined myself frenziedly dancing, ringed round by helicoptered nuns. It says everything about the chaos of life of a young Catholic girl or boy; it's like outside things are imposed in on you, a correct way of being, that you either adhere to or are estranged from. It's bound up with the idea of the Gaelicization of Ireland—de Valera's Ireland—that I can't relate to at all.

AC: This is a very unusual image with the red baby in a colander?

Well, *Becoming* [no. 18] is very difficult to talk about. My mother had this colander for straining vegetables, and [as a child] I imagined myself as a mother straining my child or something. I used it in a chalice-like way to cradle a baby/doll. Shamrocks are floating ambiguously between my mouth and the doll's mouth. It is concerned with issues of communication and identity. There seems to be a lot of anger in this painting. I'm not sure about the source of it.

An Interview with Mary FitzGerald



Heart (no. 38, detail)

MA: Tell us a little bit about your work and the pieces *Deluge* [no. 35, pl. XII] and *Spine* [no. 37].

MF: Ten years ago I was badly injured in a car accident. I couldn't move for about a year. A lot of the work has to do with vulnerability and how small the world gets when you can't move.

I have this compulsion about vast or empty spaces, and the idea of human beings being very vulnerable, very tiny in the vastness of time as well as space. I did a series based on the notion of horizons, and the horizons in the paintings are made by sheet of glass. What I'm trying to get at is that feeling of nothingness.

In the case of the *Deluge* piece, when you look into the blue-black all you can see really is your own reflection and the vastness behind, solidity and a sense of openness. This other piece, *Spine*, which combines the two ideas, while not trying to re-create it in such a way that it's too pinned down. It's made from glass, fishhooks and cloth. I try to use objects that have a vague sense of pain and vulnerability without necessarily having to write it in great big letters.

AC: With the materials and human scale of *Spine* you certainly see the reflection...

MF: I use the glass to trap things behind. Many of my works are done as installations that are built for a specific room or gallery space. You're completely surrounded. You get the sense of the large space and then you have to move in order to see the detail. So at that point the viewer interacts with the work, you physically have to move and that's part of the work.

AC: Is this diptych part of a series? It appears to have a little flash of light on the piece of glass—it glows.

MF: Yes, it's part of a series of painted pieces based on different seas, the Black Sea, Red Sea. We were in Istanbul a couple of years ago and there was a point where you could actually stand on a bridge with one foot in Asia and one foot in Europe and so I made this

painting with the actual sliver of glass. And the same is true of Red Sea. The great divide between the world religions.

MA: Do all of the *Deluge* pieces have a dark velvet panel, each one under glass?
MF: Yes, it was ceremonial.

MA: How does the process in the *Deluge* series work? Do you use oil paint on the steel panels, and do you pour it?
MF: Just oil paint, and I lay them all flat on the ground.

MA: And then did you wipe off sometimes and pour again?
MF: No, They're literally instant, they are done the way they are. I didn't want them to be as if "painted."

MA: That's part of the expansiveness you're talking about.
MF: I started basically from a sculpture background. I don't actually view these as pictorial works at all, I've never worked in that tradition. The works that I make are spatial. In a way they're like flat sculptures rather than like paintings as such. The work I do will always go right out to the edge.

A lot of pieces are built up as well. Small little areas that aren't necessary, are slightly off focus. I made a series of these little island drawings which are made of fishhooks. Some of the larger work in that series concentrates on that tiny little thing about refuge and that great big expanse. You can view that as benign or malign, depending on the way you're feeling at the time.

MA: This reminds me to ask you about the time you spent in Japan and the Asian influence on your work, and the particular relationship they have to space?
MF: Japan was very influential. I lived there for two years, and I went to college in Japan. I actually couldn't see the influence at all myself. I do think that the influence came more from things like architecture and gardens rather than painting. I learned how to make paper and I haven't made it since because you need a whole village for the process, but I wanted to understand about the quality of the materials.

I think that the influence really came from this notion of expansion of space. Again, because it's at such a premium in Japan. It's a rare commodity. The way architectural space is organized is based on the tatami mats and everything expands from there. No two houses look the same, but they're all built with exactly the same measurements. I thought that was quite an interesting principle on which to build work. That you create structure to begin with and then you actually operate within that space. It's the way that I've worked since then. Everything I did was built on grids. But you're still left with the notion that no piece is enclosed, they always work outwards. Scale is actually funny, it doesn't have to be big to have that kind of expansiveness. That would be the oriental influence. I have this affinity with the place that does something to my heart.

AC: How do you see that in terms of being Irish? I mean, here you are with this eastern aesthetic, and your roots are in Ireland, so you have this unusual mix.
MF: Remember I was saying to you about the two quite strong traditions in the contemporary Irish art of this century? One comes from this nation-state approach in which the founders of the state wanted to create images of Ireland that were of pure, Catholic and in some cases celebrating rulers...

SC: The social realist images of farmers, fishermen...
MF: Yes. And then there was a backlash against that by people like Evie Hone and Manie Jellett who created a type of art they effectively brought from France. They created the beginnings of—I suppose you would call it—a Modernist tradition. I have always come from that perspective rather than the pictorial tradition in sculpture. I wouldn't consider what I do now as Modernism, but it does come from the roots of those kinds of structures. And I suppose you're saying that eastern influence confounded that. But equally, one was at such a remove, one could see much more clearly where one comes from, which is such a benefit.

An Interview with Mary Lohan



Donegal Bay '97
(no. 4 detail)

MA: Do you have a specific site in mind with these paintings?

ML: Yes, specific places in County Donegal. I find it an extraordinarily beautiful place. I have a sister living the south of the county and I've spent a lot of time living in that area. I've also stayed on Tory Island off the northern coast.

AC: Is Donegal at all like County Mayo?

ML: Well, yes, there are broad similarities, but there are also differences. Mayo has a hugeness, a sweep that takes your breath away. There are places like that in Donegal, but because of the nature of the topography, many of the particular places that I like feel much closer, more intimate. Each valley, each inlet opens up its own little world.

MA: But this is exactly what interests me about your painting. Because of the love of abstraction they seem both intimate, as if you're looking down at a tide pool, and also they could imply great distances because they have so much atmosphere. They're both very intimate and very far.

ML: I start from the realization that it's impossible to paint a landscape. You just can't do it, because you experience a place on so many levels and in such a complex way. So you have to paint what you see, which isn't the same thing. And you hope that something of the feeling of the place will come across.

AC: Had you gone to Mayo before you went to the Ballinglen Arts Foundation?

ML: No. I've been back two or three times since. Mayo is spectacular.

MA: When you walk the land like that, when you're there, you're not actually painting a lot of the time, you're absorbing?

ML: That's right. It takes time. You have to establish a connection with the landscape. When you stand anywhere in Mayo, Donegal, Sligo you become aware that it was hugely populated 150 years ago. All the evidence is there, the ruined homesteads, the lazy beds where they grew potatoes, even in the most remote, the bleakest places. It's inescapable, and it may not provide an obvious take on the paintings but it is relevant to the emotional response that the landscape draws from you.

MA: What is the relationship between what you are looking at and how you paint it?

ML: I prefer to be there, on the spot. I paint on wood, because it can take quite a bit of punishment. I lay the panels out flat. I use a lot of paint, I love paint—perhaps making a painting is an excuse to use paint. I like that feeling of trying to get the landscape, you wrestle with it, and the physicality of the paint seems somehow to be a direct connection with the landscape for me.

AC: Do you find yourself connected to a particular painting tradition?

ML: Yes, just recently I've begun to call myself an Irish painter.

AC: Not ten years ago?

ML: I thought I wanted to be an American abstract expressionist. I can still see what appealed to me in the work of Gorky or Rothko, I still like them and see the connection. But I think that aspiration had a lot to do with the fact that we don't have a strong visual tradition in Ireland. There is a very strong literary and oral tradition but visually a sense of identity is a much more recent thing. I'm beginning to see painters that I do connect with, so that I can look back and see myself in relation to someone like Nano Reid or Evie Hone.

AC: How did you get from that early interest to what you're doing recently?

ML: With huge difficulty. I think it's an advantage to have reached the stage of being a woman with kids. With age and maturity you realize much more clearly that this is what you love doing, and that makes it easier.

AC: Do you like any of the Europeans, the Cobra school or others?

ML: Not so much the Cobra painters or the European abstract expressionists. But I absolutely adore Bonnard and Vuillard. The French have so many fantastic painters. Yet when I was in France earlier this year I looked at a lot of painting and the overwhelming feeling that I got from contemporary French art was that it's actually burdened with this

weight of tradition. It makes things much more difficult for young artists. And I thought it's not such a bad thing that in many respects we don't have that in Ireland.

MA: In some ways, this painting *Loughras Mor* is more resolutely abstract...
ML: I don't mind how abstract the painting becomes so long as that sense is there for me of *knowing* those rocks, those houses. As long as I know, I feel okay. That sense of place is still very important.

AC: Most of the paintings are where the land meets the sea...
ML: I find the sea hard to get away from. There has to be water somewhere.

AC: The water is your subject, where the water meets the land and the sky as—a source of light?
ML: I can see why some people might think that my paintings are muddy, that they have no color, because I go for those days when land and water and sky tend to merge. The light spills from one to the other. That's really what I'm trying to get all the time, the sense that they're all the one. Sometimes when you're painting the sky, you're painting the water. I'm wary of skies that are too like skies. When it's bright and sunny, I can't see.

AC: How do you know when you're done?
ML: Something tells you that you should leave it alone. But it's difficult because I paint wet on wet, so I have a limited amount of time. Often I'll paint with a lot of energy for hours until it's just too dry to go on. It gets to the stage where it will physically disintegrate into balls of paint. It would be nice if someone could find a way of keeping the paint at just the right consistency, but I don't think anyone has yet.

AC: So it's a keep it or reject it decision?
ML: It is. There are quite a few rejections. Sometimes I'm pleasantly surprised when I come into the studio in the morning, sometimes I'm shocked. You can trick yourself into thinking the painting's okay when it's nothing of the sort.

An Interview with Eilís O'Connell



To Swell the Gourd (no. 39, detail)

AC: Ireland has a rich archaeology from its Celtic past, including standing stones and megaliths like New Grange. Did these affect your work, especially your outdoor public sculpture?
EOC: They made me aware that a sculptural experience isn't just focused on the object—the space in which we perceive it is very powerful, too. Experience of these things made me realize that some sculpture should be outside, absorbing the weather and the changing light conditions. They made me aware of the power of place—how place traps people, how their lives become molded by it. Landscapes have meanings which have power over thinking and perception, but it's very subtle. Place outlives us all and we can only leave traces of our existence.

AC: You work in many materials, from industrial welded steel to cast resin, but your sculptures emphasize organic and biomorphic forms. Is there a relationship to nature expressed through your formal language?
EOC: My work doesn't always emphasize organic forms, although that is often a starting point or reference for me. My relationship to nature has changed totally since I moved to London. I find myself trying to compensate for the absence of nature in my life.

MA: Your work often sets up a relationship between man-made, tooled or machined forms and those more purely nature-derived or organic. Is this a response to the conflicts and contradictions experienced in growing up in the rural agrarian culture of Ireland and then residing in an urban, industrialized one?
EOC: Yes, there is a conflict there. I first noticed it when I lived in New York—there was this complete absence of nature, which you have to get used to. Now, in London, I'm used to it, my work is more focused on the body. It's more inward-looking and more private. I try to balance this by working for outdoor spaces.

MA: Sometimes the organic and the inorganic are paired in an obvious way as in *To Swell The Gourd* [no. 39, pl. XIII]. Do you prefer to create this tension using found objects such as the gourds?
EOC: What's important about that piece is that the gourds have grown. Their hollowness emphasizes the fact that their skin has stretched itself into being—you can sense that kind of energy around it. Although [the gourd is] a "found object" I actually had to go hunting around for it. I spent ages looking for gourds with a circular circumference. The tension lies in the fact that they appear fused to the steel structure, which itself is rusting back to its original iron oxide state.

MA: How do you select the materials for the small sculptures?
EOC: Well, first, I collect lots of different kinds of materials. Wherever I go I bring back things and these things lie around my studio for years before they get used. I really need to get a feeling for them. Materials trigger different reactions and memories in me. By having them around me I'm allowing my subconscious to absorb them. From then on I can follow my instinct.

MA: How do the small sculptures differ fundamentally from the large site-specific ones?
EOC: I make the smaller works myself and they tend to be very personal and more about the body. The larger pieces are commissioned and are very much about the place they'll exist in. Being commissioned they are very planned works and it can take from two to five years before they actually get built. It's a totally different process from my other work, lots of other people are involved, it's like being part of a team. That's very exciting when it works, it's engaging with the real world.

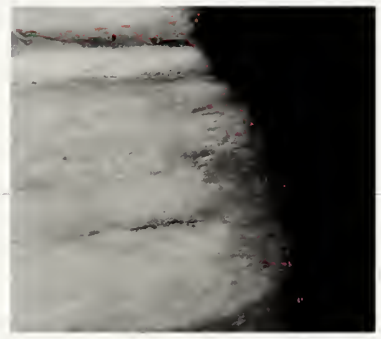
AC: Both *Cathoid* [no. 42, pl. XIV] and *Enmeshed* [no. 40] have openings in tear drop or pointed elliptical shapes. Is this a reference to the Celtic sheela-na-gigs [fig. 11]?
EOC: I've been using arcs for a long time and it's impossible for me to use an elliptical shape and not think of body references and sheela-na-gigs. Until recently, they were kept from public viewing in the Irish museums, which demonstrates the level of repression the Catholic Church has imposed on the Irish people. We are only now acknowledging that we grew up in a sort of fascist society which tried to make people ashamed of their own culture. However, since there was such a taboo surrounding the sheela-na-gigs, I was a bit disappointed when I finally saw them. I thought they would be more erotic. There's nothing fertile about them. What I do like about them is their abstract quality—the variations in body proportions, for example. There's one I saw that resembles an African sculpture. It's from Birr. The figure has her hands on her hips, her breasts are so far apart that they are lodged in the space between her elbow and her hip. Completely out of sync with reality.

MA: How do the small sculptures relate to the human body: male or female?
EOC: I'm always very surprised when my work starts to make body references—I don't set out with that in mind. My subconscious works its way into the process of making. That's why my work in general tends to be about the female body, because that's what I know best. Sometimes people mistakenly read phallic references in my work simply because an element is pointed or stands upright. Well, all human beings stand upright. I don't know what it's like to be in a man's body. I know what I know.

MA: Several of these pieces strongly suggest an enclosed interior space. Are they, in fact, hollow?
EOC: Yes, they are, and the chamber inside is a very important aspect of the work. Sometimes the apertures are quite small, so the inside remains dark and unknown. That sort of trapped space gives the work an internal energy which empowers it. A lot of my work has multiple elements and the space between them is as important as the elements themselves. I'm interested in the way the eye creates a rhythm when we look at the different parts of a piece while we physically move around it.

MA: The surfaces of many of these small pieces are very sensuous. Do you think of this surface as a skin? How do you arrive at a patina-like surface as *In The Roundness of Being* [no. 41]?
EOC: The surface is always very important because it's what the eye sees first. I think of it as a skin, tense and full of energy, with the possibility of expansion. *In The Roundness of Being* was cast in a clear acrylic resin, because I wanted it to be translucent, like another work of mine, *Spoonwomen*. This piece had given me a lot of trouble—it didn't work when it was originally cast in bronze. The translucent qualities of *In The Roundness of Being*, however, killed the form and I realized that light had to bounce off it rather than go through it. I abandoned it and later, in desperation, I began spray-painting it. I noticed that the paint was building up a very subtle texture. There are lots of layers on it and to emphasize the surface I polished it with a lead polish. It worked really well, so it's trial and error all the time.

An Interview with Gwen O'Dowd



Uaimh (no. 2, detail)

MA: The *Uaimh* series [pl. 1, nos. 1- 3] is about the stones, the rocks in Mayo?
GO: Well, actually it's not. It's more about the space in between...those dark spaces. The outer structure emphasizes the depth of these spaces and also counterbalances the vacuous with its own density.

AC: Do you paint in response to the place?
GO: The *Uaimh* series paintings originate from a place in North Mayo, which you know and recognized when you came in [the studio], so I could have called them the North Mayo Series. But I did want them to be more anonymous than that. Does it matter that it's North Mayo or not? Their life really begins here in the studio.

AC: When you were at the Mayo coast you did drawings, studies, watercolors, photos and you would have memories of experience...
GO: Yes. I made several working trips up there where I did the initial studies.

AC: And the larger drawings are also done when you get back?
GO: Yes, I wouldn't even attempt to do something resolved outside, it wouldn't interest me, you know...

AC: So the other half when you get back is really the personal, emotional response?
GO: Well, yes, the imagery goes through a lot of changes as you begin to get to know it and know what you want from it. People are reading all sorts of things into this imagery.

AC: When you say people are reading into this, are they reading things that you intended?
GO: Not exactly. It could be seen to be full of sexual imagery which in some cases is perhaps blatantly obvious. So people have to make their own commentary and I certainly don't mind any number of associations. That is why I wanted to disconnect with North Mayo one, because of its limitations.

AC: But the sexual content is not intended?
GO: No, not specifically.

AC: You've been to so many different places on the west coast, do you connect differently to places or do they all become fuel for the painter's fire?
GO: Yes, it's definitely the wild Atlantic coast that is the inspirational one. And you do accumulate knowledge with each new series of work.

AC: Do you see yourself connected to any tradition?
GO: Well, there's both an Irish and an English "abstract landscape" painting tradition and I could associate with either, the Irish coming from more of a romantic tradition, the English one coming from the abstract expressionists and as a consequence theirs is a larger format.

AC: When you say "abstract landscape painters," you're walking an edge between the two...
GO: Yes, it's enjoying the abstract quality of painting without being too specifically literal.

AC: Do you think that your Irish experience shows up in your work?
GO: I don't think these paintings could have been painted anywhere else. It would always be different. Knowing something of the local folklore and history of a place always subconsciously adds to the work. The knowledge that a number of people were chased down one of these blow holes and drowned is one of the tragic facts associated with the place.

AC: For you, is there a recent tradition of Irish painting? Who was the generation ahead?
GO: Well, of course, you have an older generation of artists who are all actively painting away like Tony O'Malley, Sean McSweeney, Barrie Cooke, Camille Souter, etc....

AC: Did the women's movement, probably when you were in college, have any affect or influence on you?
GO: It did, more so when I left college because women artists were in demand at art colleges so there was a lot of part-time teaching work available.

AC: When you were a student were there any women faculty at your college?
GO: No full-time women faculty at all in the Fine Art department. To this day, I believe there's only one.

MA: Your generation seems to be the first generation to really blossom as a larger group of artists.
GO: Yes, we were very lucky. We were very well supported, especially during the crucial early years after leaving college. In my mind those are the telling years when you have to enforce your own working discipline.

AC: When you say you were supported, you were getting grants from the council, or for exhibitions?
GO: Yes, both and the council helped set up the group studios that are still in existence today. This was a fundamental necessity, having somewhere to go to work everyday. So yes, they gave us great encouragement.

MA: Your paintings look many-layered.
GO: Yes, they take a long time, and as you can see there, they've dried unevenly so that will have to be done again. The danger is once you start back into a painting all sorts of things can happen. It takes a long time to get the finish I'm happy with.

AC: So if they take that long, do you work on more than one at a time?
GO: Yes, three or four sometimes as many as six, you just keep rotating them when you get stuck on one. Move on to another.

MA: Does the location of the empty spaces and forms happen immediately or do you shift the placement of that around?
GO: I shift a lot and you can see the remnants of that in some places...scored lines like that, which become an integral part of the finished work. A lot of changes go on. You have to make the painting work.

MA: Well, they become very abstract in terms of how you're formalizing and looking at them.
AC: The surface shows the history, the layers of what happened underneath.
GO: They're destroyed often in the process...it's a very frustrating way to work.

MA: What is the biggest frustration of it?
GO: I would never trust anything on the first attempt —it would have to be re-worked and re-worked before I'd allow it to survive.

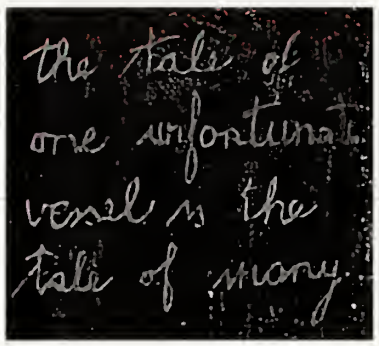
AC: Have you used encaustic, the hot-wax medium, since college?
GO: No, but I've always used more sculptural materials. In college it was usually a mixture of china clay and polyvinyl, adhesive-like mediums to use as a foundation to work on.

AC: And are you mixing oil paints or dry pigments with hot wax?
GO: Both. But mostly oil paint. You get used to particular colors from various brands. I used to make my own paint as I really liked the process of using dry pigment, but now, only occasionally, and again for particular colors.

MA: What is your favorite part of the process?
GO: When they're finished!

MA: Is it that top layer when you have enough layers to "trust" it?
GO: Well yes, when you're looking at it for several months and out of the corner of your eye you know it's all right. Every time you look at it, it's fine...then you can go to the pub and congratulate yourself with a pint!

An Interview with Geraldine O'Reilly



59 Emigrant Ships Lost (detail), no. 12

AC: Tell me about the *Land Marks Series* [nos. 8,14, fig. 16].
GO: In 1993, I was invited by Monaghan County Museum to do an exhibition for their gallery (Monaghan is a border county). I had been staying on and off in the Monaghan area for years. I decided to look at the border landscape in terms of how it is marked by the two traditions. I looked at what sort of dwellings occupied the landscape, like castles, monuments, empty houses. Castles, nowadays, would be seen as tourist attractions—but once they were strongholds, there to protect and defend. What I was attempting to do was to re-read the landscape in terms of its history. As a child my father would always translate the English place names back through the Irish to arrive at the real history of the landscape. This series of work *Land Marks* got me interested in how landscape is mapped and the purpose of mapping in the first place. *Land Marks* led me into a second series of work titled, *Entwined Histories*.

AC: So in this show the different strongholds or monuments are...?
GO: The exhibition *Land Marks* started with the piece *Outhouses* [fig. 16]. All over the Irish landscape abandoned houses are used nowadays as sheds. They're small. In the last century under the penal laws, people were penalized for making improvements to their houses—so often the houses had no chimney, the windows tiny. The outhouse is also a symbol for emigration for me. People abandoned their houses, in some cases leaving their belongings behind, to go to a new land. I've been to a house in Sligo where the owners emigrated and left all the furniture behind—the sheets were still on the bed, cutlery left on the table. Nobody had interfered with the house or its contents. The house was as it was left some forty years before. I repeated the image, like a stamp, to get the viewer beyond the obvious response to seeing the outhouse. I was trying to get under the surface of what is a very familiar image in the Irish landscape. Some of the images in the *Land Marks* series were printed up in black and yellow—colors that denote danger or sound a visual warning in border road signs.

AC: The imagery then refers to both the landscape and the landscape's history. I'm getting a sense that as foreigners we look at the landscape and see only little bit of the history and a lot of the scenery.
MA: Yes, we're seeing romantic nature...

GO: Yes. If you build a fortress, you're automatically adopting a defensive position. It's extremely difficult to step out of that position. The images from the *Entwined Histories* series reflected my observation of what was happening in the peace talks. In this series the outhouse appears again and this time symbolizes for me the Ireland I know and relate to. I trace it back to the time after the great famine of the 1840s. I refer in my work not to the great Celtic past as that link was broken with colonization.

As an artist I've had to create an identity. In my work I've tried to read the landscape not in terms of seeing it in a romantic haze but through its history of derelict buildings, monuments, strongholds.

AC: How did the *Emigrant Letter Series* [nos. 9-12, pl. IV, no. 13] from the late '80s start?
GO: I have a batch of emigrant letters which I collected when I was in America. They're very moving. I used them for an exhibition entitled *Journal* in 1988. At the exhibition, people were visibly moved—there aren't many people in Ireland who haven't been touched by the pain of emigration. People referred to letters they had from family abroad and said that they had never considered these letters as anything important in terms of the social history of the country. The exhibition seemed to stir something unconscious in the viewers. At the time I was too close to the work, so I was taken by surprise by the reaction of the public. People sent me material.

AC: People sent you letters?
GO: Well, yes. People still remember this series of work. People would stop me and say things like, "I had an uncle in America, but we never saw him again after he left but we have his letters..."

Hummingbird Productions here did a television series called *Bringing It All Back Home*, an overview of how emigration to America affected Irish music. To coincide with the television series, an evening of emigrant songs and letters was held at the Harcourt Hotel in Dublin. I donated the letters I'd collected

which were read between the songs. The letters became a symbol for the emigrants' experience after the famine as they had arrived to America carrying nothing but the clothes on their backs. When I was in New York researching for the show *Journal*, I found no artifacts belonging to the Irish who had emigrated immediately after the famine. All I found were the letters.

I found the original passport for *Emigrant's Passport* [no. 13] at a warehouse in Manhattan owned by the Ellis Island Museum.

AC: This was when you were in the United States on your Fulbright?
GO: Yes. *59 Emigrant Ships Lost* [no. 12, pl. IV] was used as the cover illustration for the re-issue of a book entitled *The Great Famine* originally published on the one-hundredth anniversary for famine. The piece is inspired by a ship's log for 1849, it's got a map of Ireland, and a piece of text taken from the *Liverpool Gazette* of the 1850s where the journalist is describing the number of ships sinking in Liverpool with emigrants aboard. There is stitching used in the piece. In a lot of the pieces I used skills like stitching which referred to the fact that this is one activity Irish women would have done in American households when they came over. A surprising number of Irish women went into domestic labor when the arrived in America.

I first heard the expression "shanty and lace" from Irish American historians. It referred to the Irish who lived in shacks and the lace curtain referred to the Irish who'd come up in the world. Apparently this group had a fondness for lace curtains.

AC: To go back to artistic heritage and roots, who do you see as part of an artistic line or heritage that you can connect to? There are not a lot of older women artists...
GO: No, but one artist I did connect with is the American artist, May Stevens. She came to Ireland to an artists' colony called The Tyrone Guthrie Centre. I was resident there at the time. I believe she was in her sixties at that stage in the late '80s.

MA: Well, you're interested in the personal and the political...
GO: Right, this was the first artist I'd ever met who put together the personal with the political. At the time she was working on a series called *Ordinary/ Extraordinary Images of Her Mother and Rosa Luxembourg*. She told me it was all right to talk about the personal.

AC: In terms of lineage, this is someone who made you think it was possible to put politics and painting imagery together. And there is nobody like that in Irish...?
GO: There are now, but they would be more my age. She would have been one of the first artists to have talked to me about "identity," heritage, your sense of place and so on. When I was in art school we looked toward New York, London, France for inspiration. I felt there was no visual tradition here in Ireland to build on. That's all changed now.

COMPILED BY RUTH-ANN M. HARRIS

The American Letter

The year 1997 marks the 150th anniversary of "Black '47," the darkest year of the Irish Potato Famine. Between 1845, when the blight damaged a portion of the harvest, and 1849, when Ireland's staple crop failed for the fourth consecutive year, at least one million Irish people are said to have died of starvation or famine-related diseases such as dysentery, cholera, and typhus. As many as one and one-half million others emigrated to North America and Britain seeking new lives in strange lands. Historians consider the "Great Famine" a watershed in the social, political and economic history of Ireland.

During and after the worst of the famine, the paucity of human and material resources left a terrible social legacy for all Irish people, and placed particularly difficult obstacles in the paths of young women. Unless women were able to marry the inheriting sons of landholders, or were inclined toward religious life, they were considered drains on their families' resources. While emigration was already well-established in rural Ireland, the numbers of peasants fleeing the country increased dramatically during the famine. Of the thousands of Irish immigrants who landed in America during the deadliest years, two-thirds were young single women.

Often the first links in a chain of migration, women emigrants maintained ties to family and friends in Ireland by reporting on the course of their new lives in letters sent on a basis as frequent and regular as harrowing work schedules allowed. The women left much unsaid in their letters, however, omissions that were widely noted and expressed in the saying, "Fine and well, just like an American letter," which became a standard reply to the standard, "How are you?" Those omissions were not accidental; letters were often written in coded language to minimize the hardships of immigrant life, and to ensure the privacy of certain passages.[1] As both public documents and the medium of intimate exchange, these letters give the contemporary reader a sense of the famine and the emigration experience as being both historic and deeply personal for Ireland and its dissipating populace. We present examples of these "American letters" as a testimony to those whose lives were affected by the famine and Irish Diaspora, and to encourage further research on the complexities of the immigrant experience.

—H.F.

Between 1850 and 1890 Irish entrepreneur Vere Foster sponsored the emigration of approximately 40,000 Irish women to America. In the letter transcribed below, Mr. Foster reports, to an unknown correspondent in Ireland, on the American labor market and the conditions young working women should expect:

The demand for Females appears to be everywhere even greater and more uniform than that for males...The wages are from 75 cents to $2 a week, varying according to experience and capacity. Many, especially at the West, report the customary position of such girls in the family as that of daughters, sitting at the same table, dressing as well or better, riding to the village church in the same vehicle, and say that they appear to marry even quicker than the ladies. The tendency throughout the West to immediate marriage is a subject of general complaint. One counts over his girls on his fingers with this curious statistical result: "In the last eight years I have had in my employ 23 girls, 19 of whom have married out of my house...Labourers of one year are the employers of the next, increasing by so much more the constant demand, and exhausting the stream of supply.
Vere Foster to unknown correspondent (n.d.), NIPRO (uncatalogued letter).

A.E. Alderdice, in an undated letter to Vere Foster, wrote of overcoming the terrors that accompanied her arrival in New York, which she credits to the kindness she encountered in her new position:

...You will think me very unkind for not writing to you before now and so it is but I hope you will excuse me sir. I am sure you would lack [like] to hear how I got along from I left farm. Well I was very sick indeed the whole voyage and it was pretty rough but the[y] were very kind to me on board and now I must tell you of How I got on when I landed. I stopped at Castle Gardens when I arrived here. On Thursday to Friday afternoon Mrs. Eccles was there...but at the wrong place. The gentleman you give the letter for was not there...the next day and when he came He sent as [his?] man...me, so I got there alright, thank God and before the door was opened I could here [hear] the Girl say, oh Mrs. Smith, Hear is the Girl so I was not sorry to hear that for I was both tired and weary and indeed...I must thank you very much for the trouble you took...at all times. I am so Happy Hear [here] and do not think one bit sorry. There is not one in the House but is so kind to me. I found them as good and better even than you told me of. I hop[e]...God spares me I shall never forget you. I hop[e] the Lord will reward you for I cannot.
A.E. Alderdice to Vere Foster (n.d.), NIPRO D3618.

Julia Fields, a maid to the Emmets, the great Irish patriot family, emigrated to the United States after the death of her employer. The postscript to her November 1844 letter from America to Mrs. Corrigan, another housekeeper still living in Ireland, records her immediate impressions upon debarking:

[P.S.] My friend, this Country is very good and markets cheap—but all persons coming here has to encounter an abundance of hardships and difficulties unknown when they land on the shore unprovided—and destitute of friends or money, and no matter how clever they may be at home in abilities of earning bread they must here begin anew for they are in a new world among multitudes of strangers possessed of customs and laws entirely foreign—and it is a second apprenticeship only that can gain them the result of their adventure as I have experienced in many. Adieu.
Julia Fields to Mrs. Corrigan, November 1844, NIPRO T3258/42.

Evidence shows that Irish women keenly recognized the significance of how they dressed. Clothing became, for the newly arrived, an expression of their intentions to assimilate with the host culture, as well as an emblem of their dreams of new lives, lives far better than

they could have hoped to attain in the old country. The wife of one of the Carrothers brothers of London, Ontario, enthusiastically describes the new-world dress styles in a letter to her mother in Maguiresbridge, County Fermanagh:

Dress of every kind is worn the same here as with you only much richer and gayer. You have always the first of the fashions as the[y] come out from England here. This has become a very fashionable place. You would see more silks worn here in one day than you would see in Maguiresbridge in your lifetime and could not tell the difference between the Lady and the Servant Girl as it is not uncommon for her to wear a Silk Cloak and Boa and Muff on her hands and her bonnet ornamented with artificial flowers and veil and can well afford it, wages is so good.

Mrs. Carrothers to her mother, August 1851, NIPRO T3440.

Margaret McCarthy, writing to her parents and siblings in 1850, encouraged them to take advantage of assisted passage, as she had, to join her in New York. Her letter is a typical "American Letter," conveying news of the immigrant to her relatives in Ireland, expressing at least a cautious optimism (and perhaps stretching the truth), and noting the immigrants' equal, if not greater concern for the country and people she left behind:

...My dear father, I must [say] only that this [is] a good place and a good Country for if one place does not suit a Man he can go to Another and can very easy please himself. But there is one thing that's Ruining this place especially the Frontier towns and Cities where the Flow of Emigration is most. The Emigrants has not money Enough to take them to the Interior of the Country which obliges them to remain here in [New] York and the like places for which Reason causes the less demand for Labour and also the great Reduction in wages. For this reason I would advise no one to come to America that would not have Some Money after landing here that would enable them to go west in case they would get no work to do here. But any man or woman without a family are fools that would not venture and where you will not be Seen Naked, but I can assure you there are Dangers upon Dangers Attending coming here, but my friends nothing can venture nothing have. Fortune will favour the brave. Have courage and prepare yourself for the next time that worthy man Mr. Boeyan is sending out the next lot; and come you all together courageously and bid adieu to that lovely place the land of our Birth...

But alas I am now told—it's the Gulf of Misery, oppression, Degradation, and ruin of every Description which I am sorry to hear of so Doleful a History to be told of our D[ea]r Country. This my dear Father induces me to Remit to you in this Letter 20 dollars, that is four pounds, thinking it might be some acquisition to you until you might be Clearing away from that place all together and the Sooner the Better, for Believe me, I could not Express how great would be my joy at our seeing you all here together where you would never want or be at a loss for a good Breakfast and Dinner. So prepare as soon as possible for this will be my last Remittance until I see you all here.

...I am sure it's not for slavery I want you to come here. No, it's for affording my brothers and sisters and I an opportunity of Showing our Kindness and Gratitude and Coming on your seniour days that we would be placed in that position that you, my D[ea]r Father and Mother could walk about Leisurely and Independently without Requiring your Labour, an object which I am Sure will not fail even by myself if I was obliged to do it without the assistance of Brother or Sister for, my D[ea]r Father and Mother.

I am proud and happy to be away from where the country charges man on the Poor Rates Mans or any other Rates Man would have the Satisfaction of once Impounding my cow or any other article of mine. oh how happy I feel and am sure to have looke[d] at the Lord, had

not it destined for me to get married to some Loammun' or another at home that after a few months he an I may been an encumbrance upon you or perhaps in the Poor House by this [time].

So my D[ear] Father according as I have Stated to you I hope that whilst you are at home I hope that you will give my Sister Mary that privilege of Enjoying herself Innocently on any occasion that she pleases so far as I have saw Innocently and as for my D[ea]r Ellen York I am in Raptures of joy when I think of one day seeing her and you all at the dock in New York... well I have only to tell my D[ea]r Mother to Bring all her bed close [clothes] and also to bring the kettle and an oven and have handles to them and do not forget the smoothing irons and Be ware when you are on Board to Bring Some good floor [flour] and Engage with the Captain's cook and he will do it Better for you for very little and also Bring some whiskey and give them [to] the cook and Some Sailors that you may think would do any good to give them a glass once in a time and it may be no harm.

Ever Dear and Loving Child,
Margaret McCarthy

Margaret McCarthy to Mr. Alexander McCarthy, September 22, 1850, QRO (uncatalogued).

Rose McCormick Williams wrote home to Ireland from New Orleans twenty-seven years after arriving in America, in search of an aunt with whom she had lost contact. In this 1879 letter, she recalls her reliance on the kindness of strangers in the days following the death of her parents:

I was under the impression that you all had left Ireland. At last I resolved to write and make inquiries, and I thank God that I have met with success. You certainly must have been astonished when you read my letter. But the old adage "Tis better late than never," proved true in this instance, though I had but very little hopes that the letter would have ever reached you. You ask me to tell you how long my Mother and father are dead, also my brothers; It has been so long and I was so young that I have a faint recollection of what transpired. We had been ten weeks on sea and had a very rough voyage of it. We all landed in New Orleans safe, sound and healthy...everything seemed to be prosperous for us, but unfortunately it did not remain so for long, for seven days after we landed Mother and James died and were buried the same day. They all died with a sort of cholera, which was at the same time raging here. We had a priest to attend to them in their last moments. Being in a strange land, amongst strangers and not being able to help one another we had to separate and do the best we could. Of course being young we did not miss the loss of our parents but many and many a time since have I missed them.

Patrick was taken in charge by a gentleman who took him to Cincinnati, where he remained for some years when he came back to New Orleans, and then learned [the] trade of ship carpenter. He remained in N.O. for some time, and then went off traveling and finally settled [in] Columbus, Georgia, were he still resides. He is married and has three children, Is engaged in Steamboating and doing well. I had not seen him for twenty years when this month a year ago he came home unexpectedly and I tell you I was very glad indeed to see him. I get a letter from him occasionally. William remained in N.O. for a long time. A few years previous to our late rebellion he went to Texas, and I had not seen him for some years when he was taken prisoner by the Federal forces and brought to N.O. So I went to see him nearly every day during his imprisonment here. He was kept a captive here for a long time, and when released went to a place called Lake Charles where he resides at present, and engaged in business there for himself. He also is making a good living. He is married but I do not believe he has any children. It has been eighteen years since I last saw him, But if possible I am going to

send my son out to see him in a few weeks. Tom and myself remained in N.O. and therefore have always seen one another. He is married also, and has had seven children, three of which are dead. He is still living in N.O.

As to myself, I was taken in charge by a lady from the County Cavan, and remained with her until I was capable of going to work. After working around for some time, I was married and lost my husband some years after. I have three children. One boy 21 years of age, named James, one girl, aged 17, named Rosa, and another Elizabeth, aged 15, all of which are very healthy. I having been keeping a grocery store for the last four years, and all of my children remain at home with me. Business is very dull, therefore not making any money, just a living. My brothers and I had a rough time of it, but always managed to make an honest living. To my recollection I have never [known of] any body that had ever been to my native town since I have been here, although I have asked many and many a one. In your next letter write to me about all the folks, what has become of them, etc. Tell me also how you are getting along, and how is your husband, and how many children you have. Also what profession or trade your son John is engaged in. Also how long after we left Ireland did my Uncle Burke leave for America, and how long it is since you heard from them. Tell me also what became of the old Homestead. Be Kind enough if possible to go to the chapel and obtain a correct list of our ages, also my mother's age. Inform me all about Ireland, as I have but little recollection of it...

Rose McCormick Williams to her aunt, May 1879, NIPRO T3258/28.

Women immigrants' letters frequently refer to networks of individuals and institutions, such as Irish Catholic parishes, that not only assisted newcomers in finding housing, work, and a supportive ethnic community, but also provided safety nets when emergencies arose. Sarah Shaw, who emigrated ahead of her niece and nephew, took responsibility for their care upon the sudden deaths of her brother and sister-in-law:

I wrote you on the 4th October that on the 30th of said month Matilda was to change her name to that of Bell, he is of...stable...habits but poor which was a very great Objection with me, if she was of a strong constitution with his Industry the[y] might do well. Farming when you have to hire all your help is not a money making business in this family, as negroes hire is very expensive, but, I trust the lord will bless their endeavours and with that if the[y] are not rich the[y] will be happy. Mr. Bell speaks of moving at least one hundred miles from here, if so it will nearly kill me to part with her, as I have never been more than a few mile distance from any of them for the last two years.

I have been teaching in Judge Perry's family, which is only 7 miles from Sarah and Alicia and 5 from M. Jane, so that if any of them is taken sick I can and am with them in a few hours. I assure you Aunt Sarah is a great somebody with her Nieces, we are truly happy in each other. I intend to suspend teaching this year for the purpose of Visiting Edward, (whom I have not seen since he left Ireland) and dear George, Matilda and myself made our arrangements before she thought of getting married which has put a stop to her going, but I intend, if spared life and health to start in March. I cannot get any of the girls persuaded into spending twenty or thirty dollars on a visit. You see how Economical the[y] are, dear Richard. I hear of you all through E. Morowitz who writes often. Mary Moats has a houseful of young ladies and young men. I wish I could see you all, all young...[I hope all] are well and unite with me in kind love to you, Mary & Robert & all the family

and believe me dear Richard
your same Old Aunt Sarah

Sarah Shaw to unknown correspondent (n.d.), private collection of the William Shaw family, Belfast.

In a subsequent letter, dated January 10, 1852, Sarah describes the hardships of helping emigrating relatives and friends. Networks of support strained under a swelling migrant population, complicating the task of providing assistance:

I have just rec'd a letter from E. Morowitz, she is most anxious for me to send for her. Poor girl she little knows how hard it is for females without a father to get along in this Country, close hard work and in many instances looked upon as hirelings. None but the assuming have any share in this little place. The[y] talk about the equality of the South but I can assure you the Lexington folk are as aristocratic as the[y] know how, it would at least take one hundred dollars to bring her here and what would I do with her [?] To pay board would be out of my power it is true I have saved a little but I am advanced in life and may not be able long to do for myself and to be thrown an dependent on my friends I never will. She says if I send for her she will pay again, that I would never look for if I had any prospect for her when here.

I have paid eight dollars per month for very different accommodation. My bed room had neither fire nor glazed window in a cold winter morning it was any thing but pleasant but it was the best I could do and therefore must submit. Seasons are much changed here. The winter fully as cold as them in Ireland but not so long...Dear Richard I wish you to write and give my your advice, will I or not make an effort to bring E. Mowritz out here. I have stated my Situation to you precisely as it is but poor Orphant [sic] child my Heart Sympathizes for her if I had her here I might take a school in the Country and have her as an assistant which would be...but it would be doing a duty. Every letter I receive [from] her makes me unhappy for a length of time. She said in her last she could get £16 per year in Dublin. That is nearly as much as I am now receiving for teaching (say one hundred dollars) and it takes it all to keep me genteely [sic] dressed as I am Obliged to be amongst such people as I live with and every article double the price of what it is at home. Dear Richard this is rather an uninteresting letter but I struck on a subject that interests me at present and you must excuse me.

Sarah Shaw to unknown correspondent (n.d.), private collection of the William Shaw family, Belfast.

Mary Gayer Anderson, unlike most of her counterparts, emigrated with enough resources to bring her maid Margaret with her to America from Rostrevor, County Down. Her letter describes Margaret's performance and the tensions that existed across class lines within the Irish-American community, as well as the degree to which Margaret's adoption of American manners and customs exacerbated the strain:

Margaret is doing very well—and since I spoke to her about keeping her Irish ways and manners, has behaved very well—but it is considered quite "infra dig"[2] for a "Help" to work with children, and she is not going to do it. She is, however, very friendly with and I think fond of them. She has an easy time here. I make the beds, settle the rooms and do anything I can of that sort. She goes out after 6 o'clock tea every Sunday and does not come in 'till 10.

Margaret does very well in all she does for us and is always cheerful and good-tempered but each week I see less inclination to do things, trying to put more and more on me and do less and less herself. She has a fine time of it—constantly out and more and so little work to do, she never touches the children, nor my room, nor the drawing room nor the parlor except to lay the table. She makes the nursery bed, but does not sweep the floor unless told to do so. Would not put coal on the fire...However it is a blessing to have her, so few have any help. Aunt M. says it is the way always with girls brought from home. When Henry was explaining to her about how much wages she was to have, in paying us back for her expenses he said, "You agreed to come for £30 a year, I will make it $3 a week, that is about £33 a year, are the usual wages here."

Mary Gayer Anderson to her mother, October 20, 1884, NIPRO T3258/4/5

Notes

1 Prior to reliable mail service (around the middle of the nineteenth century) most letters were entrusted to persons who would hand-carry them back to Ireland, so the confidentiality of the documents was never assured.

2 An Irish word, meaning "a poor man with no prospects."

3 From the Latin *infra dignatatum*, meaning "beneath one's dignity."

Abbreviations

Harris 1991
Harris, Ruth-Ann and B. Emer O'Keeffe, Eds. *The Search for Missing Friends: Irish Immigrant Advertisements Placed in the "Boston Pilot."* Boston, 1991

Harris 1977
Harris, Ruth-Ann. "Where the Poor Man is Not Crushed Down to Exalt the Aristocrat: Vere Foster's Programmes of Assisted Emigration in the Aftermath of the Famine," in *The Meaning of the Famine.* Ed., Patrick O'Sullivan. London and Washington, 1977

Lee 1978
Lee, Joseph. "Women and the Church Since the Famine," in *Women in Irish Society: the Historical Dimension.* Eds., Margaret MacCurtain and Donna O'Corrain. Dublin, 1978, pp. 37-45

McNeill 1971
McNeill, Mary. *Vere Foster, 1819-1900, An Irish Benefactor.* Belfast, 1971

NIPRO
Northern Ireland Public Record Office, Belfast

O'Grada 1977
O'Grada, Corma "Some Aspects of Nineteenth-Century Irish Migration" in *Comparative Aspects of Scottish and Irish Social and Economic History, 1600-1900.* Ed., L.M. Cullen and T.C. Smout, Edinburgh, 1977, pp. 65-73

QRO
Quit Rent Office, Dublin

Objects in the exhibition

Landscape

no. 1
Gwen O'Dowd
Uaimh Series
1996
mixed media on canvas/board
42 x 60 in.
Private Collection, Ireland
Courtesy of Kerlin Gallery, Dublin

pl. I, no. 2
Gwen O'Dowd
Uaimh Series
1996
mixed media on canvas/board
60 x 42 in.
Private Collection, Ireland
Courtesy of Kerlin Gallery, Dublin

no. 3
Gwen O'Dowd
Uaimh Series
1996
mixed media on canvas/board
53 x 42 in.
Private Collection, Ireland
Courtesy of Kerlin Gallery, Dublin

pl. II, no. 4
Mary Lohan
Donegal Bay '97
1997
oil on board
55 x 20 in.
Courtesy of Mr. John Taylor, Taylor Galleries, Dublin

no. 5
Mary Lohan
Sliabh League '97
1997
oil on board
55 x 22 in.
Courtesy of Mr. John Taylor, Taylor Galleries, Dublin

no. 6
Deirdre O'Connell
Point of Observation
1995
plaster, rust oxide, stone
3 x 4 x 8 ft.
Collection of the Artist, New York

pl. III, no. 7
Deirdre O'Connell
Repository II
1996
oil bar on paper
40 x 64 in.
Collection of the Artist, New York

no. 8
Geraldine O'Reilly
Land Marks Series
Strongholds
1994
sugar lift and aquatint etching
on Fabriano paper
39 x 27 1/2 in.
Collection of the Artist, Dublin

Emigration

no. 9
Geraldine O'Reilly
Emigrant Letter Series
Shanty and Lace
1988
acrylic, lace, collage on paper
3 x 2 ft.
Collection of Patricia Murphy, Dublin

no. 10
Geraldine O'Reilly
Emigrant Letter Series
Emigrant's Bag
1988
collage, gouache and acrylic on paper
27 x 17 in.
Collection of Maire and Maurice Foley, Dublin

no. 11
Geraldine O'Reilly
Emigrant Letter Series
Emigrant's Letter and Envelope Fragment
1988
watercolor, gouache and acrylic on paper
20 x 19 in.
Collection of Justina and Peter Farrell, Dublin

pl. IV, no. 12
Geraldine O'Reilly
Emigrant Letter Series
59 Emigrant Ships Lost
1988
acrylic, gouache, watercolor, collage, stitching on paper
20 x 19 in.
Collection of the Artist, Dublin

no. 13
Geraldine O'Reilly
Emigrant Letter Series
Emigrant's Passport
1988
watercolor and gouache on paper
23 x 15 in.
Collection of the Artist, Dublin

The Figure/Body

no. 14
Geraldine O'Reilly
Land Marks Series
Relics
1994
etching
31 x 37 in.
Collection of the Artist, Dublin

pl. V, no. 15
Eithne Jordan
Split Face I
1988
oil on canvas
59 x 59 in.
Courtesy of Rubicon Gallery, Dublin

no. 16
Eithne Jordan
Portrait of a Woman
1988
oil on canvas
51 x 43 in.
Courtesy of Rubicon Gallery, Dublin

pl. VI, no. 17
Rita Duffy
Journey
1994
oil on wax paper
46 x 48 in.
Collection of the Artist, Belfast

no. 18
Rita Duffy
Becoming
1995
oil on wax paper
46 x 48 in.
Collection of the Artist, Belfast

no. 19
Rita Duffy
Dancer
1995
oil on wax paper
46 x 48 in.
Collection of the Artist, Belfast

pl. VII, no. 20
Rita Duffy
Scullery
1995
oil on wax paper
46 x 48 in.
Collection of the Artist, Belfast

no. 21
Kathy Prendergast
Body Map Series
Vertical Section
1983
watercolor and ink on paper
30 x 12 in.
Courtesy of the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, Vincent and Noeleen Ferguson Donation

no. 22
Kathy Prendergast
Body Map Series
Enclosed Worlds in Open Space
1983
watercolor and ink on paper
30 x 22 in.
Courtesy of the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, Vincent and Noeleen Ferguson Donation

no. 23
Kathy Prendergast
Body Map Series
Vertical Section
1983
watercolor and ink on paper
30 x 12 in.
Courtesy of the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, Vincent and Noeleen Ferguson Donation

no. 24
Kathy Prendergast
Body Map Series
North-West Region
1983
watercolor and ink on paper
30 x 22 in.
Courtesy of the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, Vincent and Noeleen Ferguson Donation

no. 25
Kathy Prendergast
Body Map Series
South-West Region
1983
watercolor and ink on paper
30 x 22 in.
Courtesy of the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, Vincent and Noeleen Ferguson Donation

no. 26
Kathy Prendergast
Body Map Series
To Alter a Landscape
1983
watercolor and ink on paper
30 x 22 in.
Courtesy of the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, Vincent and Noeleen Ferguson Donation

no. 27
Kathy Prendergast
Body Map Series
To Control a Landscape—Tunnel
1983
watercolor and ink on paper
14 x 24 in.
Courtesy of the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, Vincent and Noeleen Ferguson Donation

pl. VIII, no. 28
Kathy Prendergast
Body Map Series
To Control a Landscape—Irrigation
1983
watercolor and ink on paper
14 x 24 in.
Courtesy of the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, Vincent and Noeleen Ferguson Donation

no. 29
Kathy Prendergast
Body Map Series
To Control a Landscape—Oasis
1983
watercolor and ink on paper
14 x 24 in.
Courtesy of the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, Vincent and Noeleen Ferguson Donation

pl. IX, no. 30
Kathy Prendergast
Body Map Series
South-West Region
1983
watercolor and ink on paper
30 x 22 in.
Courtesy of the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, Vincent and Noeleen Ferguson Donation

no. 31
Kathy Prendergast
Body Map Series
South-East Region
1983
watercolor and ink on paper
30 x 22 in.
Courtesy of the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, Vincent and Noeleen Ferguson Donation

pl. X, no. 32
Alice Maher
Berry Dress
1994
cotton, rose hips and pins
12 x 10 x 6 in.
Courtesy of the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin

no. 33
Alice Maher
Thorn House
1995
wood, rose thorns and glass
6 x 4 x 4 in
Dieter and Birgit Broska Collection, Ireland

pl. XI, no. 34
Alice Maher
Bee Dress
1994
honey bees and cotton wire
6 x 4 x 4 in.
Collection of the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, Belfast

Body and Nature Implied

pl. XII, no. 35
Mary FitzGerald
Deluge
1996
oil, on steel with velvet, glass and steel bolts
49 x 50 in.
Courtesy of Green on Red Gallery, Dublin

no. 36
Mary FitzGerald
Red Sea
1994
oil on canvas with glass and graphite powder
33 x 67 in.
Collection of David Murray, Ireland

no. 37
Mary FitzGerald
Spine
1996
velvet under glass with steel bolts and fish hooks
72 x 24 in
Courtesy of Green on Red Gallery, Dublin

no. 38
Mary FitzGerald
Heart
1996
velvet under glass with fish hooks, steel scalpel blades and acupuncture needles
72 x 24 in.
Courtesy of Green on Red Gallery, Dublin

pl. XIII, no. 39
Eilís O'Connell
To Swell the Gourd
1996
rusted steel, gourd, birch wood
(i) 12 x 24 x 3 in.
(ii) 5 x 5 x 7 in.
Courtesy of Green on Red Gallery, Dublin

no. 40
Eilís O'Connell
Enmeshed
1994
welded brass and woven brass wire
16 x 8 x 6 in.
Courtesy of Green on Red Gallery, Dublin

no. 41
Eilís O'Connell
In the Roundness of Being
1996
cast resin, lead polish
52 x 11 x 5 in.
Courtesy of Green on Red Gallery, Dublin

pl. XIV, no. 42
Eilís O'Connell
Cathoid
1996
cast lead crystal
12 x 12 x 6 in
Courtesy of Green on Red Gallery, Dublin

no. 43
Eilís O'Connell
Earthed
1994
patinated, painted and rusted steel
(1) 22½ x 10½ x 2¾ in.
(2) 43 x 11 x 3 in.
(3) 22¾ x 7¾ x 2½ in.
Private Collection, Ireland
Courtesy of Green on Red Gallery, Dublin

no. 44
Eilís O'Connell
Under the Precipice
1996
rusted steel
24 x 12 x 4 in.
Courtesy of Green on Red Gallery, Dublin

Installation

pl. XV, no. 45
Finola Jones
LUSCIOUS—(an aesthetic view of culture)
1993 - ongoing
Wall-attached figurines
Dimensions variable
Collection of the Artist, Dublin
Courtesy of Green on Red Gallery, Dublin

pl. XVI, no. 46a
Pauline Cummins and Louise Walsh
Sounding the Depths
installation: video projection, light boxes and sound
Courtesy of the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin

pl. XVI, no. 46b
Pauline Cummins and Louise Walsh
Sounding the Depths
Shell in Hand
Cibachrome print
Collection of the Artists, Dublin

Artists' Biographies

PAULINE CUMMINS

b. 1949

1966-74 Student at National College of Art, Dublin. Specializing in painting and ceramics

Recent Exhibitions

1997/90 Inis Oirr. Irish Geographics: 6 Contemporary Artists. Djanogly Art Gallery. University of Nottingham, England, touring exhibition and Ladengalerie, Munich

1997 Good Confession-in Loco Dei. Inner Art: North Inner City, Dublin. 2 monitor video installation in the confessional boxes of Our Lady of Lourdes Church, Sean McDermot Street.

1996/95 Video Exhibition: Becoming Beloved. Hermitage of Maria Magdalena, Lanzarole and National Maternity Hospital, Dublin

1994 Potatoes, a street installation. Irish Days. Art Centre Uska, Poland

1994 Flowing, circular sculpture/video installation. Life Cycles. Design Council Gallery, Dublin

1994/93/92 Sounding the Depths, a collaborative 3-part installation with Louise Walsh. Street Level Photographic Gallery, Glasgow, Tate Gallery, Liverpool, Kunstlerhaus, Graz, Austria and the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin

1992/90 Unearthed. Inheritance and Transformation. The Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, and Ladengalerie, Munich.

1991 Available Resources. Derry, Northern Ireland

1991 The 5th Province. Edmonton Gallery, and touring Canada through 1992

1990 Sexuality and Gender. Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin

Select Awards

1989 Arts Council of Northern Ireland, Equipment

1988 Arts Council of Northern Ireland, Bursary Award

1986 The George Campbell Memorial Travel Award

1985 Irish Exhibition of Living Art, Bursary Award

RITA DUFFY

b. 1959 Belfast

1985-86 University of Ulster, Belfast, MA Fine Art

1979-82 Art and Design Centre, Belfast, B.A. Hons. Fine Art

1978-79 Foundation Studies, Ulster Polytechnic

Recent Solo Exhibitions

1997 Banquet. Ormeau Baths Gallery, Belfast

1996 Crossing Boundaries. Exhibited in Belfast and at San Francisco State University

1995 Palimpsest. Touring Exhibition, Orchard Gallery, Derry, Limerick City Art Gallery, Model Art Gallery, Sligo, and the Triskel Gallery, Cork

1993 Drawings. Newry Arts Centre, Newry

1992 Icarus Project. Old Museum Arts Centre

1992 Small Works. Cavehill Gallery, Belfast

1991 Inflated People. Wexford Arts Centre

1991 Judith Ward Paintings. Galerie and Edition Caoc, Berlin and Old Museum Arts Centre, Belfast

1990 New Works. Touring Exhibition, Project Arts Centre, Dublin

Select Awards

1996/95 Arts Council of Northern Ireland, Major Bursary

1993 Ulster Museum Artist in Residence, Bursary

1992/89 Artist in the Community Residence Bursary

1991/90 An Chomhairle Ealaion Travel Bursary

1990 Gold Medal R.U.A.

1988/83 Arts Council of Northern Ireland, Exhibition Bursary

1988/87/86 Prizewinner Arnotts National Portraits Awards

1987 Arts Council of Northern Ireland, Materials Bursary

1986 Conor Prizewinner R.U.A.

1985 Cresent Arts Centre Residency

MARY FITZGERALD

b. 1956 Dublin

1990 Member of Aosdána
1980-81 Tama University of Fine Art, Japan
1979-80 Osaka University of Foreign Languages, Japan
1973-77 National College of Art and Design, Dublin

Recent Solo Exhibitions

1995 Paintings. Rhok Gallery, Brussels
1994 Horizon. Green on Red Gallery, Dublin
1993 Aftermath. Model Art Centre, Sligo
1993 Continuum. Jain Marunouchi Gallery, New York
1992 Orientation. Crawford Municipal Art Gallery, Cork
1992 Orientation. Oliver Dowling Gallery, Dublin
1991 Counter/Act. Oliver Dowling Gallery, Dublin
1989 New Works. Riverrun Gallery, Limerick, and Boole Library, University College, Cork

Select Awards

1992 Department of Foreign Affairs Travel Bursary
1988 Claremorris Open Art Exhibition Award
1987 Irish Exhibition of Living Art, Invited Artists Bursary
1986 Department of Foreign Affairs/Arts Council Travel Bursary
1986 Patron's Award, EV+A, Limerick

FINOLA JONES

b. 1960 Dublin

1989 M.A. College of Fine Arts, The University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia
1984-86 B.F.A. (Sculpture), Center for the Arts, University of Tasmania, Hobart, Tasmania
1977-81 Advanced Diploma in Exhibition and Display Design, College of Marketing and Design, Dublin

Recent Solo Exhibitions

1997-96 LUSCIOUS—(an aesthetic view of culture). A window installation. Broadway Windows, NYC
1996 "You look crazy on the outside." Green on Red Gallery, Dublin
1996 "please.....DO NOT TOUCH." Newlyn Art Gallery, Penzance, England
1995 BIAS—(forget roses—theres nothing like the smell of crisp, freshly printed, sequentially-numbered $100 bills). First Draft Gallery, Sydney, Australia
1995 Open Studio. The Clocktower Gallery, New York
1994 LUSCIOUS—(an aesthetic view of culture). A window installation. The Gallery, Belfast, Northern Ireland
1994 ALL THINGS BRIGHT AND BEAUTIFUL, a commissioned thematic installation. St. Andrews Church, Suffolk, St., Dublin.
1993 LUSCIOUS—(an aesthetic view of culture). Berkeley Gallery, Thomastown, co. Killkenny, Ireland
1993 THE ARDENT LOVE OF AN OBJECT—(the art and science of cultivation). Green on Red Gallery, Dublin.

Select Awards

1996 Five month studio residency, Artist Work Program, Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin
1996 Overseas Exhibition Grant. Cultural Relations Committee. The Irish Department of Foreign Affairs
1996/93/91 Arts Council of Ireland, Materials Grant
1996/93 Arts Council of Ireland, ArtFlight New York; Venice Biennial
1995 Arts Council of Ireland, Travel Award for exhibition in Australia
1994-95 One year Fellowship, International Studio Program, PS1 Museum, ICA, New York
1990 Arts Council of Ireland, Documentation Grant

EITHNE JORDAN

b. 1954 Dublin
1990 Member of Aosdána
1987-88 Artists Residency, Tyrone Guthrie Centre, Co. Monaghan
1984-87 Lived and worked in West Berlin on DAAD Scholarship
1979-83 Founding member of, and worked in, the Visual Arts Centre, Dublin
Lecturer in Painting, NCAD
1972-76 Studied at Dun Laoghaire School of Art

Recent Solo Exhibitions
1996 L'Atrium de Chaville, Paris
1995 Limerick City Gallery of Art, Limerick
1994/92 Rubicon Gallery, Dublin
1990 Riverrun Gallery, Dublin
1990 Garter Lane Arts Centre, Waterford
1990 Triskel Arts Centre, Cork
1990 Fenderesky Gallery, Belfast

Select Awards
1994 EV+A, prize for painting awarded by Jan Hoet
1986 Guinness Peat Aviation Award
1984-85 DAAD Scholarship to West Berlin
1980 Independent Artists Large Scale Painting Award
1985/82/78 Arts Council Bursary for Painting

MARY LOHAN

b. 1954 Dublin
Studied at the National College of Art and Design, School of Painting

Recent Solo Exhibitions
1995 Sea, Sand, Land and Light. Taylor Galleries, Dublin
1994 Recent Paintings. Grant Fine Art, Belfast, Northern Ireland
1993 New Works on Paper. Carrol Gallery, Longford
1992 Elements. Taylor Galleries, Dublin
1991 Donegal. Taylor Galleries, Dublin
1990 First Solo. Riverrun Gallery, Dublin

Select Awards
1995 Annamkerring One Month Residency
1994 DHL Artlift Award
1993 Fellowship, Ballinglen Arts Foundation
1992 1st Prize, Claremorris Open Exhibition
1991 Taylor De Vere Award, RHA 161st Annual Show for "An Artist of Promise in any Medium."

ALICE MAHER

b. 1956 Tipperary
1986-87 San Francisco Art Institute, Post Graduate (Painting)
1985-86 University of Ulster, Belfast. M.A. Fine Art
1981-85 Crawford Municipal College of Art, Cork. Diploma in Fine Art
1974-78 National Institute for Higher Education, Limerick. B.A. (European Studies)

Recent Solo Exhibitions
1997 L'Arpent. Le Confort Moderne, Poitiers
1996 Growths. Todd Gallery, London
1996 Familiar. Newlyn Gallery, Penzance
1996 Swimmers. Le Credac Centre D'Art Contemporaine, D'Ivry, Paris
1995 Familiar. The Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin, The Orchard Gallery, Derry, Crawford Municipal Gallery, Cork
1995 Works on Paper. Green on Red Gallery, Dublin
1992 Keep. Old Museum Arts Centre, Belfast
1991-92 Recent Work Touring Exhibition. Triskel Arts Centre, Cork, Project Arts Centre, Dublin, Orchard Gallery, Derry and Belltable Arts Centre, Limerick
1989 Tryst. Belltable Arts Centre, Limerick
1987 Transfiguration. Kerlin Gallery, Belfast

Select Awards
1996 Nominated for the IMMA Glen Dimplex Award
1992 Arts Council of Ireland Bursary
1990 GPA Emerging Artist Award
1990 Arts Council of Ireland, Artists-in-schools Residency
1989 L.S.A.D. Teaching Fellowship, Limerick
1988 Arts Council of Northern Ireland Bursary
1988 An Chomhairle Ealaion Bursary
1987 Fulbright Scholarship (San Francisco Art Institute)
1986 Peter Moore's Foundation Bursary for Further Study

DEIRDRE O'CONNELL

b. 1956 London
1979-80 M.A. Fine Art, University of Ulster, Belfast
1975-78 B.A. Hons. (1st Class), North Staffordshire Polytechnic, Stoke-on-Trent
1974-75 Foundation Course, Hertfordshire College of Art & Design, St. Albans

Recent Solo Exhibitions
1996 Hinterland, Orchard Gallery, Derry
1996 Works on Paper, Green on Red Gallery, Dublin
1994 In the Cisterns of Carthage. Fenderesky Gallery, Belfast
1990 Insula Peninsula. Arts Council Gallery, Belfast
1989 Artifact. Exhibition in conjunction with Young Arts Festival, Peacock Gallery, Craigavon
1986 Sentinel. Crescent Arts Centre, Belfast

Select Awards
1991-92 Aer Lingus Travel Award
1991-92 P.S. 1 Studio Scholarship, New York
1990 Arts Council of Northern Ireland Bursary
1987-88 Arts Council of Northern Ireland Rome Scholarship
1985 Arts Council of Northern Ireland Bursary

EILÍS O'CONNELL

b. 1953 Derry
1996 Residency at Delfina Studios, Manilva, Spain
1996 Residency at Centre du Sculpture, Montolieu, France
1987-88 Irish Arts Council PS1 (New York) Fellowship
1983-84 Arts Council of Northern Ireland British School at Rome Fellowship
1974-75 Massachusetts College of Art, Boston, USA
1970, 1975-77 Crawford School of Art, Cork

Recent Solo Exhibitions
1996 To Swell the Gourd. Green on Red Gallery, Dublin
1995 Appetites of Gravity. Hat Hill Sculpture Foundation, Goodwood, West Sussex
1994 New Work. Green on Red Gallery, Dublin
1994 The Bridge Project. Arnolfini, Bristol
1994 New Sculpture. Oriel, Cardiff
1994 And on a Smaller Scale. Martin Tinney Gallery, Cardiff
1993 The Undomesticated Space. The Gallery at John Jones, London
1990 Ancient Rain. Artsite Gallery, Bath

Select Awards
1996 Art and Work Award, Wapping Art Trust, for "Nyama," at 99 Bishopgate, London
1990 Sunday Tribune Visual Artist of the Year Award, Dublin
1990 Nordic Art Centre, Guest Studio Residency, Helsinki
1988-90 Delfina Studios Trust Residency, London
1987 Irish Arts Council, PS1 New York Fellowship Award
1983 Arts Council of Northern Ireland, Rome Fellowship Award
1981 Guinness Peat Aviation Award for Emerging Artists, Dublin
1980 Mont Kavanagh Award for Environmental Art, Dublin

GWEN O'DOWD

b. 1957, Dublin
1991 Member of Aosdána
1976-80 National College of Art and Design, Dublin

Recent Solo Exhibitions
1997/95/92/90 Kerlin Gallery, Dublin
1989 West Cork Arts Centre Butler Gallery, Kilkenny
1987 Fishguard, Wales
1984 Project Arts Centre, Dublin

Select Awards
1990 Arts Council Visual Arts Bursary
1990 Prize Winner, Oireachtas Art Bursary
1989 Irish-Canadian Exchange, The Leighton Artists' Colony, Banff, Alberta
1988 Arts Council Documentary Grant
1987 Department of Foreign Affairs Grant
1987 Irish/Welsh Exchange, Artist-in-Residence, Fishguard, Wales.
1986 Irish-Welsh Exchange, Artist-in-Residence, Aberystwyth
1985 Prize Winner, International Print Biennale, Lostowel, Co. Kerry
1984 The George Campbell Memorial Travel Grant (to Spain)

GERALDINE O'REILLY

b. 1956 Westmeath

1993-94 Member of the Graphic Studio
1992-93 Courses at the Graphic Studio
1990 Etching Workshop at the Black Church Print Studio
1989 Hunter College, Manhattan, NY, Post-graduate
1983 National College of Art and Design, Dublin, honors degree in painting
1982 AnCO Industrial Training Authority, certificate in screen printing
1979 National College of Art and Design, honors diploma in painting

Recent Solo Exhibitions

1996 Entwined Histories. Context Gallery, Derry City and Belltable Arts Centre, Limerick
1995 Entwined Histories. Temple Bar Gallery, Dublin
1993 Land Marks. Monaghan County Museum
1992-93 Rites. Project Arts Centre, Dublin
1991 Works from a Residency. Midland Arts Resource Centre, Mullingar, Co. Westmeath

Select Awards

1995/91/90 Arts Council of Ireland, Documentation Grant
1995 Borough of Dun Laoghaire and Rathdown, Artist-in-Schools Residency
1994 Arts Council of Ireland, Artists-in-Schools Residency
1994 Cultural Grant, Department of Foreign Affairs, Dublin
1994 De Grandmaison Scholarship to attend residency at the Banff Centre for the Arts, Canada
1994/93 Arts Council of Ireland, ArtsFlight
1993 Arts Council of Ireland, Materials Grant
1991 Arts Council of Ireland, Once-Off Exhibition Grant
1990 Dublin Corporation Art Grant for Dublin European City of Culture
1988 Fulbright Scholarship to America awarded by the Irish Scholarship Board, Department of Foreign Affairs, Dublin

KATHY PRENDERGAST

b. 1958 Dublin

1983-86 Royal College of Art, London, M.A.
1982-83 National College of Art and Design, Dublin B.F.A. 1st Class Hons.
1980-81 Trained and worked as Studio Camera Operator, Radio Telifis Eireann, Dublin
1976-80 National College of Art and Design, Dublin Dip. F.A. 1st Class Hons.

Recent Solo Exhibitions

1997 City Drawings. Art Now Project Room, Tate Gallery, London
1994 Peter Scott Gallery, Lancaster
1994 Royal Festival Hall, South Bank Centre, London
1991 Camden Arts Centre, London
1990 Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin and tour
1987 Unit 7 Gallery, London
1987 Henry Moore Foundation Fellow Exhibition, Camberwell School of Arts and Crafts, London

Select Awards

1995 Premio 2000, Venice Biennale
1992 Rome award in Sculpture, British School in Rome
1990 Arts Council of Ireland, Bursary
1988 Arts Council of Ireland, Macauley Fellowship
1986 Henry Moore Foundation Fellowship, Camberwell School of Arts & Crafts, London
1986 Royal College of Art Major Travel Award
1984 Arts Council of Ireland, Bursary

LOUISE WALSH

b. 1963 Cork

1985-86 University of Ulster, M.A. Fine Art
1981-85 Crawford Municipal College of Art, Cork, Diploma in Fine Art (Distinction)

Recent Exhibitions

1997-98 Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast. Public Art Re-Development
1997 Solo Exhibition. The Belltable Arts Centre, Limerick
1997 Driving Spectacle, a public artwork. University of Limerick
1996 Pride in Diversity. City Arts Centre, Dublin
1994/93/92 Sounding the Depths, with Louise Walsh. Glasgow, Liverpool, Graz and Dublin

Select Awards

1991 Arts Council of Ireland, Major Bursary Award
1989 Arts Council of Northern Ireland, Grant
1988 Arts Council of Northern Ireland, Equipment
1986/85 Peter Moores Foundation Bursary

